



Myrna Loy

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

by

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Illustrated and caricatured

by

COIA

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ANTHONY ARMSTRONG
(*'AA' of Punch*)



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With grateful acknowledgments to the
Editress and Readers of *Picture Show*,
who have encouraged the antics of the
Tallow Family for so long

Dedicated to

MYRNA LOY

The Idol of the Family

(On both the Spear and Distaff sides)

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MEET THE TALLOW FAMILY !

WITH ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

(“ A.A.” OF PUNCH)

Since you're going to meet the Tallows in these pages, there'd better be a formal introduction. I mean you can't just bounce in on them and make yourself at home, can you ? Not that they'd mind, now I come to think of it. Phœbe I know—finding herself unexpectedly the hostess of a fine bouncing visitor—would at once ask you to sit down and have tea with them ; and George, after making sure that Phœbe wasn't looking, would cock an eyebrow at you and whisper, “ Tea ! Or . . ? ” and you'd know he's all right ; and only then would they probably remember to ask your name or what you wanted to see them about.

Well, almost certainly you'd have dropped in to their lovely—and *really* old—house near Marchester to talk about pictures, for if ever a family takes the flicks seriously, it's the Tallows. George's fault probably ; the talkie habit came to him rather late in life as he was abroad a lot, and so he embraced it with all the fervour of one who feels he must make up for lost time, but Phœbe and the two children aren't far behind. They see practically every

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picture that comes along and talk about it. Gosh, *don't* they just talk about it too, when it is a picture that has really moved or roused them, till suddenly they break off a little guiltily, look at you, and Phoebe will say with her quick humour, " You know, it must be *grand* for you listening to all this, if you *don't* like pictures ! "

For a moment you take it seriously and, whatever your feelings about the flicks, start to protest that you live, eat, and breathe pictures, till a smile flashes out under her tip-tilted nose (George says " snub " when he dares and gets told off) and you realize she's pulling your leg.

" Do you like them ? " Phoebe goes on, and when you murmur that you obviously don't know as much about them as she does, she'll reply, " Well, we won't talk any more about pictures." A minute later she's asking you casually if you've seen Billie Burke in *Piccadilly Jim* and summing the film up for you in her quick incisive manner. Someone once told her she's just like Billie Burke, and she always comes up to the subject with the unconvincingly casual air of a cat approaching a saucer of cream.

Edward James has by now drifted into the room and is introduced. He is a pleasant-looking young chap, tall, tolerably good-looking and with unusually nice manners for a lad of his age and generation. He is rather like Gary Cooper, you decide, for by now you are getting the Tallow habit of comparing everyone you meet with some film star or other. He comes home from London when he can, week-ends

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The Family

and such, for he is—according to Edward James—in a terribly important and responsible position in a legal firm, and how they would carry on without him he can't think. Actually he is as yet only an apprentice, but he has the right ideas and, if confidence gets you anywhere, will do well. His hobby, after famous film stars (female)—indulged from a distance of course—is playing weird musical instruments like the tuba or Hawaiian guitar. If there be an instrument called the wumboon or the strum-pellaphone, Edward James you may be sure would play that.

He overtops George by a head, and calls him "Pop" in an affectionate, almost patronising way. George, who is not unlike Roland Young—see how catching the dam habit is!—outwardly and loudly resents the fact that he is shorter and calls it bad for discipline: secretly he is rather proud of having produced Edward James, and between ourselves, not without good cause.

You will now find that Jane has been in the room some minutes, but hasn't spoken, for she is a quiet rather reserved kid of eighteen. (But call her a kid to her face and see how reserved she is then!) She is almost unique in that, though she is often told she is very like Elizabeth Allan—as indeed she is to a remarkable degree—she makes absolutely no attempt to foster the resemblance. Though quiet by nature, when she does speak, she generally has something to say which is much to the point, whether it be a teasing remark aimed at her father, or—did you

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guess it?—about the pictures. She speaks now, for she has noticed that George, who is standing looking out of the window, has been unaccountably silent for some while.

"Well, Pop," asks young Jane, "which one is it this time?"

George, whose whole-hearted but unsophisticated admiration of the more personable specimens of the opposite sex is a byword in the family, moves away blushing.

"I don't know what you mean," he replies stiffly, but Edward James is already at the window, and diagnoses this particular case as a serious one of "pretty-widow-next-door."

"I *thought* so!" remarks Phoebe ominously.

"At his age!" snorts Edward James in mock disgust.

"What Pop sees in her I can't think," adds Jane mischievously.

There is only one thing left for George to do and he does it. He beckons to you to come into the study and—er—have a little chat about—yes!—pictures.

But you can't deceive young Jane. She remarks to the world at large that the opener for the beer bottles is in the left-hand drawer.

She's right too

You eventually leave the house feeling glad to have met the Tallows and wanting to see more of them. Do you really? Well, here's your chance! As they say in newspaper serials after the synopsis of previous instalments, "You may now read on!"

THE FAMILY SPENDS CHRISTMAS WITH GRANNIE

GRANNIE is Phoebe's mother, and she is quite a broad-minded old lady. I always enjoy going to see her, which is more than a lot of men can say about their mothers-in-law. She's not as old as May Robson was in *Wife Versus Secretary*, but she's rather that type—likes to collect her children and grandchildren round her, especially at Christmas, and size them up. The process can be uncomfortable if you're not used to it.

I hesitated about spending Christmas with Grannie this year because I wanted to go to Switzerland for the winter sports. But Phoebe argued against this. She said spending a few days with Grannie, especially at Christmas-time, would be cheap and we might save enough to go to Switzerland afterwards. She said we wouldn't have to feed ourselves for three days, and think of the saving that would be when you reckoned on turkeys, plum puddings, mince pies and things!

But it wasn't only the food, Phoebe said. There were the *drinks*! Think of last year—the number of people who dropped in just to wish us the compliments of the season, but really expecting a glass of cherry brandy or sloe gin. Goodness knows how many bottles had been drunk. Besides

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if we spent Christmas with Grannie, I could drink Grannie's whisky. Again—think of the *saving*.

Such arguments seemed unanswerable, but the trouble began when we had decided to do it, for Phoebe and Jane told all the neighbours we wouldn't be home for Christmas. When the news spread, they dropped in to wish us luck and finished off the cherry brandy and sloe gin just the same. Then Phoebe announced that we mustn't go to Grannie's *empty-handed*. She said a family of four couldn't just go and *dump* themselves without bringing something to show their appreciation. So a turkey had to be bought, and the plum pudding and mince pies were baked and put up for the journey.

After that there was the problem of clothes—neither Phoebe nor Jane had "a thing to wear" or "a rag to their backs." Apparently they just *couldn't* go away for Christmas like that . . . not to London anyway, because Grannie always gave a party for the pantomime on Boxing Night.

So Jane had to have new corsets and a pantie-belt (technically known as a "Beau Forma"), two nightdresses, some silk stockings, a hat and a winter coat—before she was fit to travel. Phoebe said she might just manage—and anyhow, she'd have needed more for Switzerland—with new evening shoes, a dressing-gown, two slips (called "Free-Flex"), an evening frock and what she described as an "odd" skirt. Women's clothes are all "odd" so far as I am concerned, especially when the odd bills for them come in.

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Well, we got packed, and squeezed into a taxi somehow with suitcases, parcels, coats, mackintoshes, the turkey (with its head and neck hanging



out of a hamper) and a couple of umbrellas. Sandy the Sealyham, furious because he knew he wasn't coming, jumped in at the last minute and bit the head off the turkey. This delayed matters, for only Jane can handle Sandy when he is in a bad mood, and she had to get out and take him to his kennel and tie him up. We caught the London train by the skin of our teeth, and Edward James was at Charing Cross to meet us, wearing a blue suit and a gardenia in his button-hole. He looked suspiciously festive. Phoebe embraced her son deliriously, asking questions the while. Why hadn't he been home for a fortnight? Why wasn't he wearing his winter underwear? Why hadn't he written oftener? Were his socks darned? Had he remembered a present for Grannie?

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Jane regarded the scene impassively. "Have you seen *The Great Ziegfeld*?" was all she asked.

Edward James broke away smartly. Yes, he *had* seen *The Great Ziegfeld* and Myrna Loy was marvellous; we must all see it, but he didn't know when, because it had left London. And, of course, he had a present for Grannie, a book. And he *had* on his winter underclothes, but he wasn't going to unbutton his waistcoat for Phoebe, not on a crowded platform and schoolgirls home for the holidays staring. Where were we going to now? We might have time to see a picture somewhere?

That sent the balloon up. I shoved the pile of luggage and parcels into the left-luggage office (which cost 2/9, and the turkey had to be put away in a separate room), then we took a bus to Oxford Street and followed Phoebe about while she shopped presents. Lunch was a hurried affair, and then more shopping, so by the time we flopped into seats for *Romeo and Juliet* I wasn't fit to speak to. However, if there is one *restful* woman in the world, it is Norma Shearer. Just to sit and look at her was balm to my jaded soul—Christmas shopping and its attendant horrors were soon forgotten in the mesmeric trance this beautiful actress always induces in me.

Grannie's flat is near the top of one of those apartment skyscrapers, and it has a restaurant in the basement. She wasn't in the least perturbed when we turned up late, dirty and tired. She gave us

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cocktails—insisting on Jane having one, too, in spite of squeaking protests from Phoebe—and then we went downstairs to the restaurant to eat. Jane had bacon-and-eggs (which she won't touch at home), Phoebe ordered a mixed grill because she is *still* slimming (when it came, we counted the things in it—a chicken's wing, two bits of bacon, a kidney, a chop, a sausage, a tomato and some fried mushrooms), I had a steak and Edward James insisted on going through the dinner menu from soup to savoury. (The only thing he didn't eat was the name of the establishment on the top.)

Christmas morning is a ceremonious affair at



Grannie's. We had breakfast upstairs in the flat and there was a pile of parcels beside every plate, but these must not be opened until the meal is

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finished. I never get anything but books, but I always enjoy the thrill of identifying the donor, as we have a pleasant custom in the family that—when you have opened your parcel—you get up and kiss the person with whom it originated. Fortunately Phoebe's pretty sister Joan was there, and she gave me a couple of books tied up in separate parcels—so I came out of the kissing business quite well.

The only *faux pas* was—Edward's present to his Grannie *and* the turkey! Edward had brought a book sure enough, but the title was "How To Be Nimble At Ninety." At first I thought Grannie would cut him off with a shilling on the spot, but suddenly her sense of humour came to the rescue and she laughed until she nearly choked. Then Jane said, "Well, I hope when I'm ninety I'll be as nimble as you are, Grannie," which put an end to the joke with alarming emphasis, and there was the immediate feeling of low pressure over Iceland because Grannie is a youngster of seventy-two and thinks of herself as sixty. And here, in a hurry to change the subject, Phoebe must needs blunder in with the bright remark: "Oh, and we've brought you a turkey, Grannie!", looking at me as if I should produce the wretched bird from my trousers pocket. It was only then I remembered that, by enjoying the immunity of a separate ticket, the turkey was still languishing in Charing Cross left-luggage office, and I had forgotten to retrieve it after the excitement of seeing Norma Shearer in *Romeo and Juliet*. Of course I volunteered to

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rush off at once, but Grannie wouldn't hear of this on a Christmas morning. We must go to church and forget about the turkey, and, anyway, it would keep until Boxing Day and come in very useful for her party prior to the pantomime.

We went to church later and then walked to the Round Pond in the Park, where a lot of kiddies were sailing toy yachts and clockwork boats they'd got for presents. Two tin paddle-boats collided in the middle of the pond, and their owners were so distressed—Jane pulled off her shoes and stockings and waded in to salvage them. A country girl thinks nothing of getting wet, but the onlookers seemed astonished. Especially when she shouted to me: "Why, Pop, it's almost warm enough to bathe!"

We had lunch in the restaurant, which was decorated with coloured papers, and like everyone else on Christmas Day, we ate ourselves out of shape, so that Edward and I went for a walk to aid digestion. He was in cheerful mood. He told me he was taking life very seriously at the office because he had fallen in love with an American girl who was working at a film studio at Wembley. "Don't say a word till you've seen her, Dad. She's coming to dinner to-night, I've bribed Grannie."

"But what about your Mother, does *she* know?"

"No, what Grannie says goes."

I must confess, inured as I am to family shocks, I felt a little dazed. I tried to remonstrate in a vague way.

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"It's all your own fault, Pop."

"My fault? Don't be absurd."

"You shouldn't have made me so keen on the flicks."

This argument didn't seem near the point at all, but a sudden thought struck me. "Is she blonde or brunette?" I enquired icily, knowing that Phoebe hated blondes.

"She's neither—she's a copper-nob."

"Like Jeanette MacDonald?"

"No—like Myrna Loy."

I began to feel the parental heartstrings softening. Edward was only twenty-one, but the influence of a nice girl would have a steadying effect on him, so long as she didn't rush him off to get married in an aeroplane at midnight or some similar freakish Hollywood idea. We walked back to Grannie's in sympathetic silence.

When Prunella Morgan (for a delirious moment I hoped her father might be Pierpont Morgan, but he wasn't) arrived, Grannie introduced her as the daughter of an old friend of her's who lived in America, so no one was in the least suspicious. I must confess I've always admired my son's taste in girls, and when it fell to my lot to take Prunella in to dinner, I confirmed his judgment again with some enthusiasm. She looked swell—tall, slim, graceful, held her shoulders well, beautifully dressed, vivacious, gay, alive, and her hair! Gosh, it was that lovely, fascinating, colour-changing reddish-brown that catches your eye, whether you're look-

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ing or not. But before I had time to make a more detailed examination, Grannie spoke :—

“Prunella’s working in films,” she explained to the company at large.

Well, of course *that* fixed it. Phoebe and Jane just fell for the girl right away. Aunt Adelaide (from whom Edward James has expectations) started clucking like an old hen with a new-laid egg. Even Uncle John (from whom Edward James has hopes, if not quite expectations) informed us in a loud voice that he’d been to see *Swing Time*. Christmas dinner at Grannie’s was a terrific success and a triumph for Prunella.

So was Boxing Night and the pantomime.

After that we went back home because Grannie said she was sick of the sight of us.

At Charing Cross Station I found a luggage ticket in my pocket and absent-mindedly gave it to the porter who was looking after our parcels. We got seats with difficulty in a crowded train, and just when we were settled the porter came along with the small luggage and a headless, highly-smelling turkey in a hamper.

Our fellow passengers in the carriage visibly recoiled.

“We can’t take that home!” declared Phoebe.

“Can’t we—you just watch!” I yelled, shoving the hamper up in the hat rack. “We’re saving this for the winter sports in Switzerland—it’s the only thing left to save!”

WOMEN ARE CALLOUS CREATURES

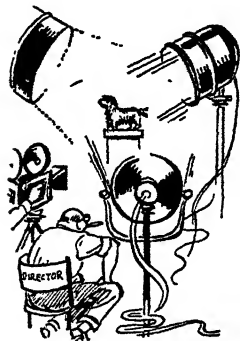
SANDY, our Sealyham, though a terrier of some distinction and intelligence, is still—in my opinion—a long way from becoming a film star. Jane has had hopes of him in that capacity ever since she first saw the famous fox-terrier, "Asta," in *The Thin Man*. Her favourite hobby now is what she is pleased to call "the study of animal appeal."

From my point of view the matter is becoming serious because I am dragged to every film that has a dog in it. My attention is being constantly directed to figures concerning the vast sums of money earned per week by "Flash"—the spaniel in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, by "Buck" in *The Call of the Wild*, and even by less gifted animals which, by reason of patient training, have become gold-spinners for their masters.

Meanwhile, in Jane's spare time, our unfortunate Sandy is getting trained in "film technique." He has to sit quite still under a bright light in the kitchen, while Jane pushes chairs about to represent a camera shooting him. He has been taught to cross his front paws and shut his eyes in an attitude of prayer, while Little Mistress is preparing for some Great Sacrifice. He must bark at a given signal, but not too loudly or the imaginary recording

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apparatus may get damaged. All these things he has suffered patiently but without enjoyment, until the latest great idea was born—to worry the legs of my trousers until we go together to find The Body. He likes that, and already my best grey flannels resemble a dustman's cast-offs.



For the first rehearsal Jimmy, the boy who brings the milk in the mornings, was co-opted as The Body. He had finished his rounds and graciously allowed himself to be stretched out under a hedge

while Jane covered him with dead leaves. After Sandy had hauled me outside by the trouser leg, he soon found the boy and enlivened the proceedings by biting his ear. Naturally Jimmy didn't like this and had to be pacified with a shilling before he would stop howling. Jane, however, seemed quite pleased with her pupil and assured me that Sandy would soon be turning in his fifty pounds a week. Personally, I would be quite content if he ever earned enough to buy me a pair of new trousers.

In our search for films with animal appeal we visited many cinemas. We saw one picture in which Ned Sparks ran a performing dog act, but they were the sort of circus dogs that stand on their heads or their tails to oblige anybody, and all Ned had to do was to make the right signals at the

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right time, which he did in a nervous sort of manner, as if he were afraid of getting mixed. Alice Faye was in this picture, so I'm afraid I didn't pay much attention to the dogs, but Jane said they were a wash-out.

Then we had to travel miles to see an old picture in which Cliff Edwards sings a song in which he dreams—(a) that he is Romeo climbing a ladder to his Juliette, but the ladder breaks just as he is reaching the arms of his beloved and he falls out of bed with a crash on the floor; (b) that he is Anthony making fervent love to a fascinating Cleopatra, only to wake up and find that the woman in his arms is his wife; and (c) that he is receiving warm kisses from Nell Gwynn, but on waking, they turn out to be merely affectionate licks from the family mongrel. "That's the scene I wanted you to see," exclaimed Jane enthusiastically. "We must teach Sandy to do that."

The thought of Sandy being taught to jump on my bed and lick my face in the mornings during countless rehearsals, left me cold and rather listless, so I was glad when Jane discovered a film in which dogs were allowed to do their stuff in the open air. It was called *Two in Revolt*, a story about a pony named Warrior, and an Alsatian dog called Lightning, who had established a firm friendship in the days of their extreme youth, and who remained true to each other through thick and thin throughout life. They were trained in a truly marvellous manner, and most of the action took

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place in wild country which resembled the Rocky Mountains. Here the dog and the pony played games together, chasing each other and romping about in the wild exuberance of youth, until the dog got into trouble with the owner of the farm and was driven out to live in exile in the desert. But his friend the pony, who was being trained for the race track, refused to settle down without his companion. He became a warrior by nature as well as by name, and no one could do anything with the brute without sustaining severe physical injury.

At last one evening Warrior escaped from his stable to join his canine friend Lightning in the desert. The two resume their wonderful friendship. They endure much privation and danger together. They perform their tricks, without (apparently) any supervision from trainers concealed in the background, until Lightning decides that it is time to bring Warrior home again to master, and the serious business of racing. After which both dog and horse combine in winning wads of dough for the stable.

I was almost as sentimental and enthusiastic as Jane, about animal appeal as we wended our way homewards. The talk was all about dog-stars, and I was assured that our Sandy was already well on his way to that place in the affections and esteem of picturegoers which none but really first-class performers can attain. So sure was Jane about this that my imagination began to play with thoughts

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of Hollywood, where I would bring Sandy to the studios in much the same way as Shirley Temple is brought by her mother, and watch over him tenderly while he was delighting the directors. I felt kindly towards Sandy, and vowed to treat the little dog in future with all the generosity due to a great artist.

Phoebe was at the gate to meet us when we arrived home—a most unusual procedure.

“What’s the matter?” I exclaimed.

“You’ll have to go to the police station and bail out Sandy—he’s locked up.”

Visions of our poor little dog-star whimpering in a whitewashed cell, crossed my mind. “What on earth has he been doing?” I enquired.

“He pulled the pants off a policeman,” Phoebe snorted, “and the Inspector won’t let him out until you’ve paid for the damage.”

I turned to Jane for help and sympathy, only to find she had gone into the house for a piece of bread and jam because she was hungry. Women are callous creatures!

THE VICAR GOES HAYWIRE

MY enjoyment of a quiet Saturday afternoon was interrupted by our Vicar on the telephone. He said he was so impressed by William Powell's demeanour in *The Ex-Mrs. Bradford*, that he had made up his mind to preach a sermon about it and hoped we would come to church on Sunday to hear it, because a lot of picturegoers were coming. I replied, truthfully, that we hadn't seen *Mrs. Bradford* yet, and that the moral would therefore be lost. "What!" the Vicar shouted, "you don't mean to tell me you haven't been to see Jean Arthur this week?" I said: "You mentioned William Powell first."

At this point we seemed to be talking at cross purposes. The Vicar said young people ought to see the film because it proved that divorcés were often so unhappy that they wanted to pick up the threads of their wrecked lives again by re-marriage. I said, doubtless. The Vicar said he couldn't quite make up his mind about Jean Arthur. I said I couldn't either, but I intended to go on trying. The Vicar said, "No, no; I don't mean what you mean" But the telephone girl, who had been listening all the time (she always does when the conversation is about films), evidently thought that things had gone far enough, for she

VICAR GOES HAYWIRE

put me through to the box-office of the Grand Cinema. Needless to say, the manager strongly advised booking seats for *The Ex-Mrs. Bradford*, as



it was playing to full houses. He implored me to explain why his cinema was packed one week and empty another. It hurt him, he said, to have to "turn money away," and why weren't there more Jean Arthurs?

I convinced him with difficulty that I was quite content with one Jean Arthur, and succeeded in booking two seats.

Phoebe was very cross at first when she learned we must go to church to hear the Vicar's sermon on Sunday, but she became a little mollified when she realised that as a preliminary we had to go and see William Powell. Phoebe adores William, and at once presumed that the Vicar intended to hold him up as an example to all the young men of the parish. She recalled how thrilling William had been in *The Thin Man*, and how in that film he had fought through at least four separate "hangovers," yet his work as a detective had actually improved. She said she had often wondered what happened to Rosalind Russell after the fade-out of *Rendezvous*, when William Powell chased her along the station platform, because it looked as if anything might . . .

"You've got this all wrong," I expostulated.

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"*Mrs. Bradford* is an ethical film or the Vicar wouldn't be preaching about it. It deals with a serious problem, and you must be prepared to view it in the proper spirit."

When we arrived at the Grand, my first impression was that the Vicar had gone a bit haywire. The story is about a busy medical practitioner (William Powell as Dr. Bradford) who has apparently resumed bachelor existence with considerable comfort and pleasure, until his ex-wife (Jean Arthur) turns up again to serve him with a writ for non-payment of alimony. As he refuses to pay she refuses to leave, which I thought would take some explaining away in a sermon even if approached in the broad-minded manner And stay she does to the extent of moving in with a large consignment of trunks.

Ex-husband William, doesn't really mind his wife returning, provided she renounces her old tricks of working out plots for thrillers, the original cause of their divorce. Otherwise he was fond of her, as any sensible man would be under the same roof as the lovely Jean. I soon forgot all about sermons and morals and everything else as I watched her, and listened to that husky voice which breaks every now and then into a funny squeak. It's a haunting voice and a thrilling one, if you keep your ears pinned back to catch the dancing wisecracks in it.

Of course, she soon starts leading her ex-husband astray again (though only so far as his work is

VICAR GOES HAYWIRE

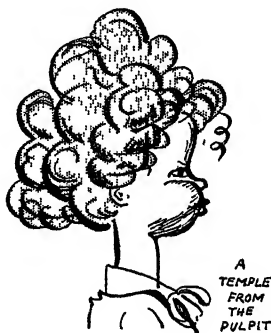


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concerned, that we can see), and before the poor chap knows where he is, gangsters and detectives are all round the place. Murder most foul has been committed at a race-meeting, and the Doctor, to clear himself from suspicion, is forced to lead the investigations to find the real criminal.

In one way at least he is fortunate. Jean Arthur, his adorable ex-wife, hardly ever lets him out of her sight. This was also lucky for us, I thought, for soon we were being swept along in a storm of thrills and laughs, produced in the best Hollywood tradition. Jean never failed us, and some of the scenes were side-splitting where she kept knocking out her ex-husband with vases and jars, when she was really attempting to intervene on his side.

In the end, when justice has at last triumphed over villainy, and the unfortunate ex-husband, his head tied up in bandages and his face covered with sticking plaster, is resting after his labours, Jean Arthur reveals herself as the ruthless little person she really is. "Will you marry me now?" she enquires of her beloved William. "My dear, I couldn't walk across the street to marry you," he retaliates. "Could you stand up, then?" Poor William Powell sighs



VICAR GOES HAYWIRE

like a beaten man, which he is. "The age of chivalry is not past," he groans, standing up. Upon which the lights go out and a clergyman appears on the home-movie screen, all set and ready to do the re-marrying. "I thought this one up myself," boasts the brazen Jean, and the ceremony proceeds.

As we walked home Phoebe said that if she were a parson she would preach against women chasing men in that determined manner, because say what you liked, there was no getting away from a girl with Jean Arthur's pep and personality. She said poor William Powell hadn't a chance, as he was always in an injured state when his ex-wife made him promise to do things that really mattered. But she said she'd mention the adorable way William Powell just went on *loving*, even after he'd been knocked about a bit, because it wasn't everybody who could survive such tests of loyalty and devotion. Not any of the men Phoebe knew anyway

At supper conversation flagged, our minds seemingly still full of the sermons we would preach. I said the Vicar would probably take the angle about the evils of horse-racing, gambling, murder, cocktails and gay women, because the only way parsons ever got a kick out of such things was by going to the pictures. Then the telephone rang.

It was the Vicar on the line again. Yes, he had finished his sermon and hoped it would be a good one—Shirley Temple was *such* a little dear and had such a vast appeal.

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

I shouted: "Shirley Temple! I thought you were going to preach about William Powell and Jean Arthur in *The Ex-Mrs. Bradford*."

"Was I?" enquired the Vicar absent-mindedly. "Oh yes, yes, of course, so I was . . . but I hadn't seen *Dimples* then . . ."

That girl at the telephone exchange is becoming very intelligent. She cut off the line before the Vicar heard my reply.

THE FAMILY GHOST IS LAID

IN many popular screen dramas the settings represent old houses with a family ghost. Our house is an old one, and after all the pleasant years we have lived in it only recently did I become aware that it was haunted. For some time strange noises had been emanating from the rafters—not the creaking, groaning, ball-and-chain sounds usually associated with spooks, but tappings and thumpings as though somebody was dropping heavy weights about. Naturally I didn't say anything to the family, not wishing to create uneasiness, and, as the row usually happened in the afternoons when I was busy in my office, no one else seemed to have any suspicion of ghostly intrusions.

Things got to such a pass, however, that I felt there was man's work to be done. Frankly I hoped it would turn out to be bats or even rats, rather than a spook, but I armed myself with a poker before I crept upstairs to the attic. The sight that met my eyes when I got there was so surprising that I nearly dropped it. Phoebe was standing in the middle of the floor, which had been cleared of its usual assortment of old boxes and suitcases. She was wearing a red cotton jumper with a roll back collar, and a boyish pair of baggy white shorts which had large pearl buttons on the thigh and a patch

hip-pocket. Her back was turned to me when I entered, and she seemed engrossed in some kind of chart which was pinned on the wall. She hadn't



PHOEBE GETS DOWN
TO IT

heard me creeping up the stairs, and when I said "What's troubling you, sister?" she folded up like an accordion.

It turned out, of course, that I had blundered into one of those secrets that men are not supposed to discover until the appropriate moment. Phoebe was learning tap dancing. She had got bored with slimming on the balanced-food-calorie plan, and was now keeping pace with her figure by means of a correspondence course in stage dancing. The noises which I had attributed to the supernatural were merely the tapping part of the training, and the thumps which had disturbed me at intervals were the occasions when she had got her legs crossed and sat down heavily on the floor.

"It isn't easy," she exclaimed ruefully, indicating leg bruises and large patches of dust on the seat of the pants. "You've got to keep your ears pinned back. Try this one yourself and see . . ."

It would have been easy for me at this stage to have beaten a dignified retreat, after apologising for my intrusion, but—like a fool—I at once became interested in the chart and spent the rest of the afternoon capering about the attic. The assistant-in-charge-of-pep at the correspondence school

FAMILY GHOST IS LAID

would have been mightily pleased had he seen me after that, creeping up to the attic every afternoon, to do my daily tapping.

Had I guessed the sequel, nothing on earth would have persuaded me to commence the accursed thing—for Phoebe, now quite convinced that we were both very good at it, put our names down as competitors in a dance competition to be held at the parish hall in aid of the Welfare League! The thought of this approaching tragedy haunted me much more terribly than any ghost could have done—even if he chose to arrive with his head tucked underneath his arm, or dragging a clanking arsenal of missiles.

An idea for escape came to me, however, during a wakeful night, but I knew I should have to use diplomatic channels to put it into practice. I went about the matter craftily. I mentioned at breakfast that now we were in the position to *criticize* tap-dancing we ought to run over to Eastbourne for a day to see Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in *Swing Time*. I said we could study their movements from the point of view of experts who are familiar with the technique of the thing, and not just have to sit about gaping like mesmerised penguins the way people did who were not *au fait* with the dance routines.

Phoebe swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker. To Eastbourne we went, that very afternoon.

The first few shots of *Swing Time* are immensely entertaining, Fred Astaire meets Ginger Rogers

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accidentally in the street, and he is so instantly smitten by her beauty that he follows her to work and finds she is a dancing mistress in an academy. This proves to be a heaven-sent opportunity for Fred. Though a professional dancer himself, he pretends to know nothing about it, and then goes through a quaint series of false steps ending in crashing falls, to the tune of "Pick Yourself Up," a delightful Jerome Kern air with expressive lyrics.

"Nothing's impossible I have found," croons Fred, as he pulls Ginger down on the floor beside him with a bang, "For when my chin is on the ground, I—Take a deep breath, Pick myself up, Dust myself off, and Start all over again,"—all of which is great fun for Pupil perhaps, but a bit hard on Teacher who is getting bored with it, even when her adorer continues, "When you remember the famous man, Who had to fall to rise again."

Fred doesn't look like a famous man, but he very soon assumes the rôle of hero when Eric Blore (proprietor of the dancing establishment) sacks Ginger for inefficiency as an instructress. Fred is

aghast at such treatment. He gives an immediate demonstration of how much he has learned from his curly-headed teacher. It seems quite a lot, for



FAMILY GHOST IS LAID



FRED
ASTAIRE

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

the dance is one of those whirling affairs that are so intoxicating to watch. Eric Blore was charmed, and so were we.

From then on Fred and Ginger start "keeping company," though at first Ginger is inclined to be a bit stand-offish, or even a little sulky. She doesn't really fall in love with her new boy friend until one day when she is engaged in shampooing her hair and overhears him singing about her in the sitting-room. The song is set to another very tune-ful melody called "Some Day," and it describes Miss Rogers in a nutshell, "Lovely—never, never change, Keep that breathless charm, And your cheeks so soft," implores Fred at the piano. No girl so serenaded could fail to slip out of the bathroom to listen, even if her beautiful head is still covered with shampoo soap. She pauses beside him as he continues, "There is nothing for me but to love you, Just the way you look to-night."

Fred pretends of course, to get a shock when he sees his beloved one in *déshabillé*, but he doesn't really, for Ginger has never looked so enchanting in her career.

That is the beginning of their partnership in singing and dancing, and around these two gifted stars the story appears and disappears in the hands of a brilliant supporting cast. When Fred and Ginger are together they whirl about like feathers in a gale, or else they waltz glamorously tap-dancing the while. Sometimes their legs are like springs while their bodies sway like willows, but never for one

FAMILY GHOST IS LAID

moment are they out of harmony with each other or the music. And in the straight bits of acting they are so natural that they impart a ring of sincerity which makes the extravagant comedy live.

The more uproarious side of it is supplied by Victor Moore as "Pop," Helen Broderick as "Mabel," and Eric Blore as "Gordon." Every time they appear it means a laugh, and if only we could have kept up with Helen Broderick's wise-cracking, the laughs would have been one long scream. It is so slick that some of the best bits were missed, but laughter, song and dancing, are the staple ingredients of this entrancing picture—and what dancing!

Phoebe said she wanted some tea when we got out of the cinema, so we went to a bun-shop and sat down. She was silent for a long time until the girl brought the cakes, but after selecting the largest, stickiest, and most fattening confection from a tray Phoebe seemed to revive somewhat. "I guess stage dancing is just one of those things you have to be born to," she remarked.

I agreed casually, but my heart strings were stirring with hope.

"It's come over me that you and I aren't quite good enough to appear in public, Pop."

I grabbed a large sticky mass of cream and icing and buried my face in it. The family ghost was laid!

NO MORE LADIES FOR GEORGE

A VERY odd thing happened to me the other day—I sprained my ankle. I had been sawing up logs for firewood, and when I was carrying a pile of them into the kitchen I put my foot on a bone belonging to Sandy the Sealyham. There was a sudden frightful wrench, and when the doctor came he said I mustn't put my foot to the ground for several days if I hoped to avoid permanent injury.

Now a sprained ankle is a hard thing to take philosophically. Not only was I severely handicapped as regards my work, but I wasn't able to go to the pictures. I had been looking forward for weeks to seeing Joan Crawford and Robert Montgomery in a revival of *No More Ladies*, not to mention such personal favourites as Charles Ruggles, Edna May Oliver and Franchot Tone—all of whom, I imagined, would be tremendous fun when acting together in the same cast.

When Phoebe and Jane were setting out to Manchester to see this film, I felt that fate had dealt hardly with me. Phoebe felt so, too, because she came into my room and said she *hated* leaving me alone; and then she put some fresh barley water on the table (this had been ordered by the doctor, though what connection the nauseous drink

NO MORE LADIES FOR GEORGE

has with sprained ankles is difficult to understand), a clean handkerchief, some novels and magazines at my bedside, found a soothing musical programme on the radio, and went out, leaving the front door unlocked because she always forgets the key.

I lay there for a while, reading and listening to the music, but soon the programme changed to some kind of melodramatic play called *Dirty Work*, in which there was a lot of shouting, galloping and gunshots—and as the machine wasn't properly tuned in, the noise from my set was appalling.

There was nothing I could do about it but throw all the books and magazines at the radio, hoping to break something, but this only seemed to make the noise worse. Then the telephone rang, and it was a lady in the house next door who has recently rented it furnished for a month or two wanting to know if I would please turn down the radio or close the windows. I said I couldn't, because I was in bed with a sprained ankle and couldn't get up. "I don't like it any better than you do," I said peevishly. "The door is unlocked though, and if you'll come in and do it for me, it's all right with me."

There was a long and suspicious silence, and then I heard a low and musical laugh, and the voice said, "O-kay, Big Boy."

Well, she turned out to be a very nice young woman called Mrs Prince-Mills. She explained that she was a widow and had rented the house next door because of her little boy Willie, who had

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been ill, and the doctor had ordered him country air during convalescence. In fact, he was the reason why she had called me on the telephone, as he was resting now. While she talked she was very busy turning off the radio and tidying-up the books I had hurled at it, and then she sat down on the end of the bed and went on talking. I noticed that she was very attractive, with huge brown eyes that smiled at you, like Jessie Matthews's (kind of mischievously, I mean), and she



had a small, oval face with a wide, expressive mouth and was dressed rather *marvellously*. The frock was a sort of two-piece crêpe of navy-blue and white, and with this she had on a white stock round the neck, like Leslie Howard wore in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

Somehow or other we got talking about films. She had seen all the very latest, even pictures like *The Great Ziegfeld* and *Rembrandt*, but the one she raved about was

NO MORE LADIES FOR GEORGE



JOAN CRAWFORD

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The General Died At Dawn, because of Gary Cooper. There was simply nobody in the world to compare with Gary, she thought, and it didn't take me long to gather that he was her idea of a hundred-per-cent. REAL MAN. When I told her that our son Edward James was supposed to be rather like Gary Cooper, her enthusiasm knew no bounds, and we must have been talking for quite a while, when Phoebe and Jane came back from the pictures. Phoebe looked a bit startled for a second, but she was quite friendly when I introduced her to Mrs. Prince-Mills. She smiled when we explained how we had got acquainted over the radio play, *Dirty Work*, and said she must call on Mrs. Prince-Mills and *how kind* it was of her to come in and help her poor invalid husband, and wouldn't she stay and have some tea?

But Mrs. Prince-Mills wouldn't stay on account of her little boy who'd been ill, and she shook hands with me and said she'd like to drop in again sometime. And I assured her very heartily that I hoped it wouldn't be long before she did.

Well, after this odd happening Phoebe started acting very queerly. She moved about in the house in a sort of aloof way as if she had something on her mind. And when I was able to get up and hobble with the help of a stick, she was very sweet and charming in a kind of *studied* manner. I was puzzled, because in all the years we had been married I never knew her so *polite*.

NO MORE LADIES FOR GEORGE

One day I said to Jane, "By the way, how did you like *No More Ladies*?"



Jane pouted. She wasn't quite sure. Charles Ruggles was very funny, of course, and Joan Crawford and Robert Montgomery were very good, but . . . there was a tremendous lot of dialogue without much action, and Jane thought the story was rather silly.

I inquired absent-mindedly what the story was about.

"Just one of those marriage problems," Jane explained. "Joan Crawford is happily married to Robert Montgomery, until he starts taking an interest in other women—you know the sort of thing? But Joan cures him by treating him very distantly as if she didn't care, and in the end Robert can't stand it, and gets wild, but it cures him so that he never wants to speak to any girl except Joan again. At least . . ." qualified Jane, with a sophisticated shrug, "that's what we are supposed to believe."

Suddenly I began to see daylight. I said to Phoebe when we were alone, "What's the sense of upsetting yourself about Mrs. Prince-Mills? She was only in here a few minutes."

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"A few minutes?" said Phoebe coldly. "She was here for three hours!"

"Nonsense!"

"More than three hours. *Dirty Work* started on the radio at four o'clock, and we didn't get back from Marchester till after seven." She held up the weekly radio programme to prove the statement.

Then we both started to laugh, and Jane came in and said we were laughing in exactly the same way as Joan Crawford and Robert Montgomery laughed in *No More Ladies*. She remembered this, she said, because they went on laughing long after the film was ended.

Phoebe remarked quite seriously, "There isn't going to be another picture, George?"

I said, "Of course not," and got up and glanced out of the window.

As luck would have it, Mrs. Prince-Mills was cutting flowers in her garden. She smiled and waved a bunch of daffodils at me.

HURRAH FOR BONNIE SCOTLAND

I MUST have seen Laurel and Hardy dozens of times on the screen, but up to the present they have never done me an injury—except to my ribs from excessive laughter. Now I have a definite grievance against them for conspiring against the peace of my household.

Edward James has been home for a short vacation. He is a generous-hearted boy, and, as the weather was wet yesterday, he suggested taking his sister Jane to the pictures if I would advance him the money. I did so willingly. I have always brought my family up to regard the cinema as a form of education. They seldom miss a film that comes to the neighbourhood, and I am pleased to observe that their reactions to such entertainment are usually intelligent and sometimes amusing. Even when friends become critical I assert that many valuable lessons can be learnt from the pictures which may be applied to our daily life. Our Vicar sees this point. He seldom preaches a sermon nowadays without reference to the current film at our local cinema, and when Jean Harlow is known to be the subject of his text, the congregation increases amazingly. Mae West always means a full house.

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Well, the picture selected by Edward James for the edification of his sister, was *Bonnie Scotland*, featuring Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy in the



leading rôles. I was busy and could not accompany the children, but I gathered after their return to the house that the programme had been enjoyable. In fact, such were the noises of friendly horse-play accompanied by the crashing of overturned furniture, that Phoebe was a little upset.

She said Jane would never become a lady if I tolerated such conduct, but I merely smiled and assured her that girls-will-be-girls and boys-will-be-boys. I smiled, that is, until I had need of my bowler hat for a visit to London.

I must admit that both Edward and Jane were contrite when I confronted them with the battered headgear. They confessed they had been trying-out a trick—apparently successfully performed by Stan Laurel—in which you wear a bowler hat, lean against a wall with the rim pressed hard to the bricks, put your finger to your mouth and blow. Provided the pressure of the rim is sufficient, the hat will rise from your head and cause a comical illusion.

Jane demonstrated the trick several times, and

HURRAH FOR BONNIE SCOTLAND

in spite of myself, I departed to London in good humour, though forced to wear a soft hat better suited to the country. When I returned after a busy day and hungry for supper, however, I was none too pleased to be met by a distracted Phoebe in the hall, and informed that my favourite dish of haddock and poached eggs had not materialised. It appeared that Jane—again imitating those master mirth-makers, Laurel and Hardy—had borrowed the haddock to experiment in cooking it on the wires of her spring mattress with a tallow



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candle underneath. The haddock had soon become quite unfit for human consumption, and there wasn't another in the house. I kept my temper with the resolution of a man jumping into a cold bath.



This time Jane was really penitent. She said that Laurel and Hardy always made her crazy. She vowed she would never go to see them again. But all Edward James said was . . . "You really mustn't miss *Bonnie Scotland*, Dad, you'll laugh like a drain pipe."

After all the tribulation I had undergone, it's hard to admit that I *did* laugh unrestrainedly, when I took Phoebe to see the film on the following day. I hope the noises of mirth I made in no way resembled a drain, but I can vouch for the fact that several people in the audience regarded Phoebe with astonishment. The sounds she made were like a whole farmyard of chickens laying eggs, and when her voice eventually gave out, all she could do was to sit panting and holding her sides.

The story of *Bonnie Scotland* is certainly original. Stan and Oliver arrive in Scotland, hoping that Stan's grandfather had left him an inheritance. But all he had left were some bagpipes and an antique snuff-box. These, however, used as props, are quite sufficient for the two comedians, and

HURRAH FOR BONNIE SCOTLAND

the audience indulged in gales of laughter for a considerable time. But the story had to continue, so as they are really stranded without money, without food and—in Oliver's case—almost without clothing, somehow or other they join the army and find themselves in a kilted regiment.

I quite believe that Scots people may not agree with me, but I have never seen anything so funny as Laurel and Hardy dressed up in kilts. The two certainly revel in the strange experience themselves, and when as "soldiers" they go from one form of trouble to another, giving their sergeant (James Finlayson) enough worry to turn his hair grey, I enjoy myself thoroughly. James Finlayson puts in a very clever bit of acting all through, and there is a delightful little kitchen scene in which he is being entertained by Daphne Pollard, the housemaid, which is quite a gem,

though it hasn't a great deal to do with the continuity of the story.

For the rest we are carried along with the preposterous comedy, by the gagging of Laurel and Hardy which, somehow or other, they manage to keep at a high level. The bar-

rack-room scene in India, where their comrades pull their legs about a mirage, has now become a classic. As newcomers to the tropics, they are in-



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formed that you often see things that aren't there, and this is demonstrated by a soldier playing an invisible melodian (his pal who is really producing the music is concealed), and both Stan and Oliver are so mystified that we shriek with joy.

This scene, indeed, gave Phoebe during our walk home, the clue about getting even with our offspring. They were both hungry and waiting eagerly for supper when we returned. They licked their chops when Phoebe said that as a special treat we would have some cold chicken and ham. Later, when she appeared with a large dish and a large cover, they pulled their chairs up to the table expectantly.

When the cover was removed the dish was empty, but for a while Phoebe went through the motions of helping us all to generous portions, and I pretended to eat with enjoyment.

Neither Edward nor Jane stared long at the *mirage*. They went into the kitchen like dutiful children and started to scramble some eggs. During supper the subject of *Bonnie Scotland* was tactfully omitted.

AUNT ADELAIDE GOES WEST

WHEN I am in London on extended business I always make a point of staying with a relative of Phoebe's called Aunt Adelaide, a charming spinster lady in the early sixties.

Auntie's habits were rather prim until a year or so ago. Her hobbies were entirely domestic. She liked knitting and novel-reading, and could enjoy them both at the same time. Sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, with her gold-rimmed spectacles perched on the end of her nose, she would peer at a book while her fingers flicked unceasingly at the needles. Strange to relate, the knitted garments which emerged were of the finest pattern (I happen to know, because she made me a delightful pull-over for a birthday present), while the books, when they were finished, had been read intelligently, for she could discuss them afterwards for hours in a manner which proved her attention was alert.

Sometimes, as though to cultivate a further sense, Aunt Adelaide turned on the wireless while she was knitting and reading, but this did not happen often, because she disliked what she called "modern" things, particularly music. Modernity, indeed, was not one of her strong-points. She wore her hair, though it was thick and of a lovely silver shade, packed into a bun at the back of her

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neck. Her clothes were of that rusty-black variety, patronised by the Victorians. And she lavished her affections upon a poisonous tom-cat called Tony, who gave everyone who came to see his mistress a dirty, jealous look.

"I GOT DAT
SOME'W' "



THE CAUSE
OF AUNT A'S
TRANSFORMATION

This was before Aunt Adelaide met George Raft in a film called *The Glass Key*!

I am afraid my family was responsible for the George Raft business.

Auntie was staying with us, and naturally we took her to the pictures for the very good reason that we wanted to go to them ourselves. Up till then Auntie hadn't thought much of the flicks, but for some reason George Raft fairly swept her off her feet. As Edward James put it in the expressive language of his age, "The old girl seemed to go nuts about him." There was no getting away from the fact—a revolution of some kind took place in Aunt Adelaide's previously tranquil and uneventful existence!

The last time I stayed with her I could scarcely believe my eyes. I don't think she had had her face actually "lifted," but there was such a bloom on her complexion, she must have been having a lot of treatment for it. The bun into

AUNT ADELAIDE GOES WEST



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which her hair was previously coiled had been replaced by a pretty permanent wave, which became her well and made her look years younger. Though she still wore black dresses, they were cut quite décolleté at the neck.

My admiration must have been apparent, for she blushed slightly as she filled the cocktail shaker.

I said: "What have you been doing since I saw you last? Have you seen any more pictures?"

"I've been to see *The Ghost Goes West* seventeen times," replied Aunt Adelaide calmly.

"What?" I gasped in astonishment.

"Yes, and it will soon be eighteen, because I'm going to take *you* after dinner."

So *this* was how the land lay. Auntie's affection for George Raft had transferred itself to Robert Donat. Tut! Tut! I ate my dinner rather abstractedly. Well, I didn't blame the dear lady, for Robert had impressed me vastly in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. After all, he was the embodiment of handsome, agile vital youth, and I could understand elderly persons taking a motherly interest in such a fine fellow. I supposed that one of the secrets of his marvellous personality on the screen was that women, of all ages, simply couldn't help themselves in their adoration. "He must look marvellous in a kilt," I murmured.

"He does," said Aunt Adelaide, taking her lipstick out of her bag. "We'd better go now, or we'll miss the beginning."

The Ghost Goes West is a curious, light, fluffy

AUNT ADELAIDE GOES WEST

picture, directed by René Clair. It is about a shy young Scot called Donald (Robert Donat), who owns one of those ancient uncomfortable castles in Scotland, but is forced to sell it to a rich American (Eugene Pallette) because he is bankrupt. The new owner, however, has no intention of residing in Scotland, so the castle is taken to pieces, stone by stone, and removed to America where it is erected again.

But in Scotland the castle was haunted by a ghost, Murdoch, the ancestor of young Donald. And, of course, the ghost has to go to America, too, so we get the strange and amusing spectacle of Murdoch (also played by Robert Donat), the disembodied spirit, travelling in the luxurious surroundings of an Atlantic liner, later to emerge and haunt once more his own castle when it has been reconstructed in Florida



It is all very well done for those who enjoy that sort of thing. Robert Donat, as both the young Scot and as the ghost, is as fine and manly and hearty as you could expect. Jean Parker, as the heiress to whom the ghost reveals himself now and then as an ardent lover, is pretty and as uninteresting as she is meant to be. Eugene Pallette, as the rich American who becomes the proud

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owner of Glowrie Castle, does an excellent character study of the part. There are marvellous sky effects, and the photography reaches a level rarely attained in England. There were flashes of genius and (for me) moments of acute boredom, but then fantasy is not the easiest thing to put on the screen, and no one but René Clair could have attempted this. In short, it is a film to see because of its originality, but not the sort that the average fan would get crazy about.

I simply couldn't understand Aunt Adelaide wanting to see it eighteen times.

She arrived downstairs the next morning for breakfast in a dress about ankle length in the skirt, a pair of high-heeled shoes, silk stockings, horn-rimmed glasses and a little black hat perched on one side of her silver curls. Her eyes were as bright as a sparrow.

"Got a date with Robert Donat?" I enquired mischievously.

Aunt Adelaide snorted.

"I can't see why they make such a fuss of that young man," she exclaimed. "He's quite good, of course, but he learned nearly everything he knows from Eugene"

A great light suddenly dawned on me. "Eugene Palette!" I exclaimed.

Aunt Adelaide blushed again slightly. "Isn't he just adorable in kilts?" she murmured.

THE MILKY WAY

THERE is now no doubt whatever in my mind that Jimmy, our milk boy, will have his name in electric lights some day. Ever since Jane trained him to be "The Body," with Sandy the Sealyham in the leading rôle of rescuer, he has been moving from strength to strength. That he feels the urge is certain, for he now spends all his spare time at the Grand Cinema doing odd jobs.

When *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* was shown, Jimmy rode a horse about the town, looking as near to a real lancer as he could get with a Turkish towel tied round his head for a turban. During the run of *Her Wedding Night* he was the bridegroom in a wedding tableau which the manager staged to give atmosphere to the picture. And, as an additional attraction to *China Seas*, Jimmy stood outside the front entrance in the picturesque robes of a Malay pirate.

There are times, too, in his normal capacity of milk boy, that Jimmy shows a surprising intelligence. He rides a bicycle which has a frame to hold the bottles, and for a time the rattling noise this made, when it approached our house, roused the dogs to a pitch of frenzy. They chased Jimmy on his bicycle until he solved the problem

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by omitting to bring us any milk at all unless the dogs were shut up in the back yard first. But, so that we shouldn't miss the noise of his early morning arrival in any way, he whistled songs from the films through his teeth to the accompaniment of the rattling bottles. The neighbours, I understand, bribed him with money to stop this.

But it was during the run of *The Milky Way* that Jimmy got his most important part. The Manager of the Grand hired a horse and cart for his milk bottles (by kind permission of the proprietor of the Dairy Farm), dressed Jimmy up in a peaked cap and white overalls, gave him a pair of tortoiseshell-rimmed glasses with no lenses—and turned him out in the dual capacity of milk boy for the Dairy, and advertising agent for the Grand. This stunt was an enormous success: everyone on Jimmy's milk round felt a keen personal interest in the picture.

Not that Harold Lloyd needs any advertising in our neighbourhood. He started tickling our insides at the very beginning of the film, when, in company with his brother milkmen, he was overcome by the hiccups and rudely interrupted the sales manager's discourse. After that, we just sat and laughed almost without stopping, though the film was well directed, and there were contrasts inserted to give us a rest. The story is simple and appealing, because Harold is such a mild, harmless sort of fellow who, in the ordinary way wouldn't be seen near a boxing ring. He gets

THE MILKY WAY



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mixed up with two boxers quite accidentally because they are forcing their attentions on his sister (Helen Mack), and in the brawl which ensues, one of the boxers gets knocked out. A photograph appears in the Press depicting Harold as the lad, who by one blow has defeated the middle-weight champion of the world, and in a night he becomes famous. And fame means much to him, as he is now in love with a lovely girl (Dorothy Wilson); and the milk business is none too good because "Agnes," the horse that draws the milk cart, is in an *Interesting Condition* and inclined to faint at intervals.

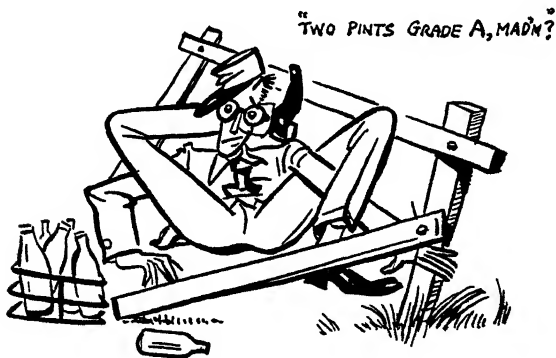
"Agnes" is a very fine animal actress. She moves when Harold blows one whistle and stops when he blows two. She nods her head to say "yes," and she shakes her head to mean "no." In fact, Agnes and Harold are such pals that when she faints in the middle of the road he becomes very distressed and agrees to take up a boxer's career to maintain her while she is having her foal.

After that there are some side-splitting scenes at Harold Lloyd's training quarters. Though he is an expert at dodging blows, he is not so good at giving them, until it is discovered that he can fight to slow waltz music if it is played soulfully. Adolphe Menjou is the promoter and arranges faked fights for Harold, with the idea of getting good odds for the final fight when the real champion is to be backed to win. But when the big night comes along Harold is missing—he has gone to

THE MILKY WAY

visit Agnes and her foal ! Never have the rafters of our Grand Cinema been shaken with such laughter, as when the foal jumped into the taxi with Harold to accompany him to the fight. Farmers can appreciate a joke like that.

What a very handsome woman Verree Teasdale is ! In this film her chief rôle is wise-cracking and looking lovely in the very choicest of frocks. We would have been glad if the film had *dwelt* a little when Verree was about, but the director aimed at speed of action and speed of dialogue, and he certainly got it, for the shots seemed to succeed each other like lightning. The journey from milk boy to partner in a large Dairy business was a short one so far as Harold Lloyd was concerned.



I fear it won't be so easy for our Jimmy to attain such heights—not in the milk trade, anyhow. The following morning I had scarcely finished

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

shaving when away in the distance there was a noise like a fire-brigade in action. It came nearer and nearer, and then there was an almighty crash. The family reached the garden in time to see a horse jumping our hedge with a couple of shafts from a cart still clinging to its harness. Embedded in the hedge, with his peaked cap over one ear, but still wearing his "say-bo" glasses, was Jimmy.

He said he'd been trying to teach the horse to act by whistle in the approved Harold Lloyd manner. But it wouldn't. It was one of those horses that had known better days as a steeple-chaser, and every time Jimmy whistled it jumped over a hedge.

"Are you hurt?" enquired Phoebe anxiously.

Jimmy pulled his peak cap on straight and at once resumed his official manner.

"Two pints Grade A as usual, madam?" was all he said.

INDOOR GAMES AND OUTDOOR SPACES

IN our neighbourhood it has become a sort of recognised tradition that the "party" season must be inaugurated by the Verekers, a rather highbrow, intellectual couple who pride themselves on inventing clever indoor games.

Nobody enjoys these parties very much, but it's got so that Christmas wouldn't seem to be coming, if the Verekers didn't give it a "kick-off," and although it means a night of agony to me, I always accompany the family—if only out of curiosity to see what sort of darn-fool games have been thought out for our bewilderment.

This year was no exception. Hardly had all the guests assembled, than Gertie Vereker handed each one a piece of paper ruled off in 25 numbered squares. Several of the men (including myself), who had pencils swore they hadn't, but that didn't defeat Gertie. She managed to dig up 22 pencils and two fountain pens from somewhere, and then Claude Vereker appeared with a huge piece of cardboard, also ruled off in 25 squares. Each square contained a dab of something from the pantry, the name of which we had to guess—a dab of cheese, a dab of mustard, a dab of salt, a dab of flour and dabs of 20 other things.

"Everybody may look at the things on this card," cried Claude, apparently delighted with himself. "Then write down in the corresponding squares, on your own paper, what you think the different things are."

I had just written "Nuts" in one of my squares, when I heard a throaty chuckle and looked round to find our Vicar gaping over my shoulder. He said, "You should spell it 'N-E-R-T-S' in the American manner, the way they say it on the films."



SIREN SEEKS SAUSAGE

I folded my paper absent-mindedly and then tearing it up in small pieces, I enquired, "Talking of films, have you seen anything good lately?"

"Sure!" cried the Vicar, twisting his paper double, then doubling it again and tearing the result into little bits. "I've seen *Under Two Flags*—a remarkable picture, George. You mustn't miss it—a very beautiful story of a woman's sacrifice."

At this moment Gertie Vereker began announcing what the different ingredients on the large card were, so we had to pick up our scraps from the floor rather guiltily and try to appear interested. Somebody had all the answers right, and the prize was a box of cigarettes.

"Cigarette!" whispered the Vicar in my ear. "You *must* see Claudette Colbert as 'Cigarette,'

GAMES AND SPACES



she's wonderful," and then he passed on to do his social stuff with the other guests, and I was left alone to meditate.

But not for long. The next game was even worse. Claude arrived in the room with a large pan in which were gathered together bunches of carrots, beet, turnips, beans, oranges and various other commodities. As if that wasn't sufficient, Gertie produced from somewhere a tray containing tins of various descriptions. This game called for partners. The women picked out of the tray, and the men out of the pan, and then you had to find the partner that matched the thing you had in your hand, like—Cream and Sugar, Salt and Pepper, Corned Beef and Cabbage.

The thing I picked was a small piece of sausage which lay in a bag, and with this I went away to a far corner of the room thinking myself safe from interruption—but what a hope! Almost immediately I was joined by Mrs. Prince-Mills, the widow, with a potato in her hand. "Sausage and mash!" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"But that's a raw potato," I objected. "You ought to look for the chap with carrots or onions, you ought to try to find . . ."

"I wanted to find *you*. Have you seen *Under Two Flags*?"

I regarded the widow steadfastly. She was dressed in one of those make-men-swoon creations, a sort of dramatic black velvet backless affair, tied up somehow round the neck. "No," I said, "I

have not seen *Under Two Flags*, but the Vicar tells me it is a beautiful story of a woman's sacrifice. He said Claudette Colbert was simply wonderful "

"She's very good," admitted the widow, and then her eyes became suddenly dreamy. "But what men! Ronald Colman and Victor McLaglen . . . oh la, la . . . what *Vikings*!"

At this point the conversation was interrupted by a pale-looking youth with an eyeglass and a tin of baked beans in his hand, who said he was looking for a potato, and he whisked the widow off to join in further developments of the game. For my part I survived the rest of the evening somehow, nourished mainly by the resolution that to avoid going completely crazy I would have to visit the cinema at the earliest possible opportunity.

Which resolution I put into effect the very next day. Needless to say, after hearing of its effect upon such completely different people as the Vicar and the widow, the picture I selected was *Under Two Flags*.

I was well rewarded for the agonies I had endured at the Verekers, for here was a picture of the open air and the wide open spaces. A story of love, battles and sudden death; of reckless adventure and deathless passion, a very whirlwind of action.

It's an old, old story of the Foreign Legion which has been told and retold many times. It started as a novel by Ouida, it became a play, twice it was filmed for the silent screen, and now it

is a "talkie"—undoubtedly the best medium it has yet discovered. The cast is superb. Claudette Colbert as "Cigarette," the lovely, warm, companionable little French girl, who loves everyone in the Legion without much discrimination, until she meets Ronald Colman as Sergeant Victor, and eventually sacrifices her life for his. Claudette never had a better part than this, nor has it ever been better interpreted.

Then Ronald Colman, the young Englishman, exiled from home through no fault of his own—what a dashing Legionaire he makes! No wonder Cigarette loves him, and Rosalind Russell cannot resist him in the moonlight of an African oasis.

And Victor McLaglen! It isn't often I feel sorry for Victor, as he usually gets his own way, but in this film he gives a vivid portrayal of a strong man shaken to his foundations by the love of a beautiful girl, when he finds it unavailing.



"THE DASHING LEGIONAIRE"

For the rest, there is Rosalind Russell, very beautiful but rather prim; and Gregory Ratoff in one of those lifelike cameos at which he excels; and Nigel Bruce, and Herbert Mundin, all in clear-cut parts which suit their personalities. It is a masterpiece.

I was in a mood of exaltation when I got home to supper, and found Phoebe reading a letter. "It's an

GAMES AND SPACES

invitation from . . . " she commenced, but I interrupted immediately.

"If you think you're going to get me out to another of those indoor game parties," I shouted. "you're mistaken. Nothing would induce me, I won't go"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," chided Phoebe. "Who said anything about indoor-game parties? It's from the Vicar, asking us to tea on Saturday. He wants to take us to *Under Two Flags* afterwards. What a pity you've seen it."

For a moment a vision of Claudette Colbert and Ronald Colman, making hot love in the desert, flashed across my mind.

"Let's go," I said.

MONKEY BUSINESS

NEW clothes are said to inspire women with a superiority complex, but with Phoebe they do more than that. Ever since she returned from London with her winter outfit, she's been "high hat" in more senses than one. In fact she has treated me as if I were some sort of provincial oaf who never visits town, and because I like going to bed early (in order to get up early) comparisons between the gaieties of London and the dullness of the country have been frequent. However, knowing the mood would pass, I humoured her one evening by sitting up later than usual to hear a light musical programme on the radio. When it was over Phoebe made an astonishing remark.

"Supposing you and I were divorced, George," she said.

"What do you mean?" I gasped, taken by surprise.

"I only mean *supposing* we were . . . and then we met afterwards, at a party or somewhere. What would you do?"

I said I desired notice of such an important question, that I must have time to make up my mind. Then I enquired (concealing at the same time a fleeting tremor of anxiety) what might have given rise to such a profound observation.

"Oh, nothing personal," said Phoebe reas-

MONKEY BUSINESS

suringly. "The thought occurred to me when we heard Zelma O'Neill singing in one part of the programme to-night, and then Anthony Bushell, her



former husband, came on afterwards in the same show. I was wondering what divorced people did, supposing they met each other in a corridor or on the stairs or some place. It would seem kind of awkward, wouldn't it?"

Which gave me my opportunity. "So far as I am concerned," I remarked, shrugging my shoulders carelessly, "I wouldn't mind meeting Zelma O'Neill on the stairs or in a corridor, or anywhere else for that matter. What a charming, delightful little person she is, with that lovely dimpled chin, that flashing smile, that expressive, agile figure. I've always longed to meet her."

Phoebe interrupted. "I asked you what you would do if you met ME, not Zelma O'Neill."

"I'll have to think it over," I replied. "By the way, when you were in London did you see *My Man Godfrey*?"

"No. Uncle John tried to get seats, but he couldn't."

"Very well then, we'll go to Marchester to-morrow, and when I've seen what William Powell does to his former wife, Carole Lombard, maybe

I'll know the answer to your question. And you'd better wear your new high hat," I added, retreating toward the stairs, "because William Powell is very particular about dress."

But in this instance I was wrong, because when we had settled into our seats for *My Man Godfrey*, and the picture began, William Powell didn't seem nearly so particular about his own dress as usual. Never have I seen a dirtier-looking, down-and-out hobo as he appeared. He is living in a rubbish dump, a member of a gang of forgotten men, and even though his comrades call him "Duke," it is more in deference to his powers of leadership than to his looks. His clothes look as if they had been picked out of the dustbin, while his chin has collected a dirty, stubbly beard.

It is thus that Carole Lombard (as Irene Bullock) discovers him and brings him back in triumph to her house. She is a spoiled, petted, pleasure-loving daughter, in a crazy family consisting of Alice Brady (the mother), Gail Patrick (an elder sister) and Eugene Pallette (the father); to whom is added a permanent visitor in the person of Mischa Auer (mother's boy-friend). The home, need it be said, is a luxury mansion.

The introduction of this "forgotten" man to the wild party in progress, leads to very unexpected developments. William Powell is offered, and accepts, the job of butler, though the odds seem against his holding it for long. No other butler has been able to bear with this eccentric family,

MONKEY BUSINESS



WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

and the reason is quickly explained. With the possible exception of Mr. Bullock (Eugene Pallette), it is a household in which no self-respecting servant could remain ; but for this very reason, and the fact that however crazy they may be, the family is always interesting (Irene in particular), the new butler settles down quite comfortably in the rôle of the perfect manservant.

He has many trials to bear. Both the sisters, susceptible to William Powell's good looks, try to lead him into compromising situations where even the best-mannered butler might be excused for losing his self-possession. One of them (Gail Patrick), failing to implicate him in other ways, even resorts to hiding her pearls in his bed so that he may be accused of crime. In fact, the only member of the family who retains any form of sanity is Eugene Pallette, who gradually discovers that this " forgotten " man is a genius.

How the butler saves the family fortunes, how Gail Patrick's deceit is unmasked, how the " Duke " rescues his comrades of the rubbish heap, and how Carole Lombard runs her man to earth and marries him willy-nilly, makes a most entertaining and amusing film story.

Some of the scenes are stimulating in their originality. Carole Lombard and William Powell, washing-up plates and dishes in the pantry, are obviously enjoying the unique position of being so intimately together again. The dialogue fits in perfectly with much of what might have happened

MONKEY BUSINESS

in their own private lives. Yet another scene, where William dumps Carole into a shower-bath, and literally drowns her by turning on all the taps, is a masterpiece. But the funniest scene of all, was one where Mischa Auer imitates a gorilla so realistically that the "family" is terrified rather than entertained. We nearly split our sides laughing at this life-like impersonation.

Phoebe was rather silent as we drove home, but presently she remarked, "I know what you would do to me, George, if we were divorced and met me afterwards. You'd spank me and push me into a shower. William Powell seemed positively to *enjoy* doing that to poor Carole."

"You're quite wrong," I said. "I've thought of something far better. I'd imitate a gorilla and make faces ^{at} you. I'd leap about and frighten you out of your wits—and your boy-friend!" I added triumphantly.

Again there was silence, and I thought the subject was closed for good, but Phoebe suddenly burst out laughing.

"What's the joke?" I enquired politely.

"I was just thinking what a *wonderful* gorilla you would make," said Phoebe.



THE CASE AGAINST VENTILATION

ONLY once in a blue moon does Phoebe lose her temper with me, and then you can bet a thousand pounds to a ha'penny the upsetment has something to do with the films. This particular wrangle was no exception.

MacSweeny, the manager of our little cinema—the Grand, is a simple-minded fellow. For this reason we nick-named him the “Babe” some years ago, and it stuck, because in addition to a childlike personality, he weighs about 230 pounds of solid flesh, and his bull neck is so wide that no one can tell where it ends or his face begins. When he laughs his jowl breaks into waves. (Jane says that to make the Babe laugh is like throwing a pebble into a pond—the last wave must finish up in the middle of his chest somewhere.) But his patrons love him in quite a personal way, and to please them is his one and only concern in life.

Well, the “Babe” and I are great friends, and one day he confided in me that he was having trouble with his proprietors, because they felt the time had come to offer clients more inducements. He said he was all in favour of that, but the latest idea was that the air inside the Grand should be pure and clean, that it should be changed frequently

CASE AGAINST VENTILATION

in fact, after being washed, humidified and served up to the nostrils in a fresh, delightful condition. He said he wanted my views on the matter.



I protested at once. I said: "Look here, Babe—you can't go messing about with our air like that! It's the same air we've had since 1923, or, anyway, since the beginning of the talkie era. Besides, what are you going to do with Winnie, the girl who goes round with the per-

fume squirt? You'd humidify her on the dole."

The Babe looked relieved and pointed to a letter on his desk. "They're sending down an expert," he complained, scratching his head in a puzzled manner. "They say we must be getting short of oxygen."

Now my idea of fun has never been connected with engines for cooling-plants, but before I went home, the Babe had made me promise that I would come back on the following day to support him during his interview with the representative. He said maybe I'd bring Phoebe along to be introduced as one of his best customers? And afterwards we could have a couple of free seats for *The Case Against Mrs. Ames*.

Phoebe wouldn't have anything to do with the proposition. She said I could tell the Babe she

thought the atmosphere of the Grand was lousy, and it was a wonder we hadn't all been poisoned years ago. She said she wasn't going near the Grand to-morrow, and that I must take her to see *Swing Time* at Marchester, because she hadn't seen Fred Astaire since his son was born.

Well, that started it, for of all the darned silly reasons I'd ever heard for going to see a film, this struck me as the darndest. I said, "Huh? And I haven't seen Paula Wessely since her daughter was born," and the brass rags parted.

Normally the most placid of wives, Phoebe got into a rage with me, and by tea time we were scarcely on speaking terms. To make matters worse, it was the evening Alastair Cooke talks about the cinema on the radio, and he gave us his opinion of the ten best films produced during the year in their proper order of merit—and Clark Gable wasn't in one of them! After that I thought Phoebe would destroy the set, she got so angry. We both went to bed in very bad humour.

But next morning, to my surprise, pressure over the Channel was high. Phoebe said that after all a free seat was a thing not to be sneezed at, and she had decided to come along with me and help the Babe in his arguments. She said that maybe machinery for washing the air might be a bit out of place at the Grand because, after all, our village wasn't like Bombay, where people went to the cinema to get cooled in the hot weather by refrigerators, and didn't care in the least what sort

CASE AGAINST VENTILATION



of pictures were on the screen. She thought, as our audiences were mostly composed of farmers, they wouldn't miss a little oxygen now and then.

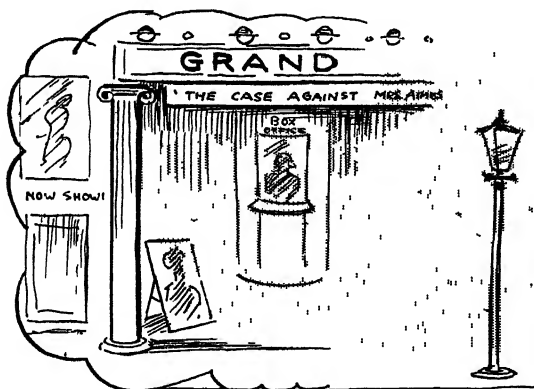
When we got to the Grand the Babe wasn't in, but the free seats for *The Case Against Mrs. Ames* had been left for us, as promised. Nothing could have had a more diverting influence than this picture. Madeleine Carroll, as Mrs. Hope Ames, is a young society woman whose wealthy husband has been murdered under circumstances which look black for her, as she was the only person known to be near him at the time. Her defence is that her husband has committed suicide, and this she manages to prove by the unconventional method of magnetising the jury with her glamour. She walks up and down in front of them, cajoling one, whispering impassioned speeches to another, giving a third the "glad eye"—until the 12 good men and true don't know whether they're standing on their heads or their tails and are reduced to the status of ogling Mental Mummies.

They return to court with the verdict of "Not Guilty," upon which George Brent (very rightly) makes an unseemly disturbance in court. In his capacity of prosecuting counsel he considers that Madeleine has gone further than the Law will allow. Poor George! All he got for his spirited protest was a spell of gaol. His enemies were too much for him just then; the odds were too heavy.

However, you can't keep a good man down for long. Madeleine had returned home triumphantly,

CASE AGAINST VENTILATION

a free woman with but one idea, to enjoy the companionship of her little boy, Bobbie, from whom the cruel prison had parted her. What a shock she gets. Mother-in-law Ames (Beulah Bondi), a most unpleasant, frosty-faced person, has been getting at little Bobbie and poisoning his mind about his mother. She now proposes to keep him altogether, on the grounds that a mother who has eaten out of the tin bowl, even if proved innocent afterwards, was no fit person to have the custody of her own child. A scene ensues in which poor little Scotty Beckley (as Bobby Ames) is made to appear the most revolting of children.



He decides to stay with his grandmother, and this brings on a new lawsuit in which Madeleine chooses to fight desperately for her inhuman little offspring

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Up to this point we had been taking the picture seriously, treating it, in fact, like a murder mystery ; but when Madeleine rushes off to the gaol where George Brent is languishing, bails him out and appoints him her new attorney, we feel that director Seiter has taxed the credulity of his public rather high. Especially as her first steps in the matter are to take George home with her and make him so drunk that he has to be carried unconscious to bed.

But the real comedy in this picture is provided by Arthur Treacher and Edward Brophy. But for them we would have certainly laughed in the wrong places, an unforgivable sin in our Grand Cinema. Still, we were bewildered when a second long court scene begins in which Madeleine Carroll, now with the skilled assistance of George Brent, attacks Ma-in-law. Little Bobbie again behaves so shockingly that we wondered why anybody should go to so much trouble to claim the little brat. In the end of course, Madeleine gets what she's been asking for (which serves her right), and we are left with the strange impression that George Brent will marry the widow, though *why* remains a mystery.

It wasn't till we got home that we remembered our appointment with the Babe and his fresh-air representative. I wanted to start back at once, but Phoebe went to the telephone and rang up the Grand.

The Babe said everything was all right now, and

CASE AGAINST VENTILATION

he didn't require our assistance. He said his proprietors had changed their minds about the machinery for air-cleaning, and had sent him down a new type of perfume squirt and an expert who was training Winnie in how to squirt it. He said he hoped we had enjoyed *The Case Against Mrs. Ames*.

If he could have heard the howls of laughter in which we indulged ourselves for the next ten minutes, the Babe would have been quite convinced that we had.

A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

EDWARD JAMES is one of those tall, lanky elastic-boned chaps, who pour themselves into armchairs and then refuse to go to bed at a sensible hour. He is crazy about dance music, and will sit for hours with a pipe in his teeth, absorbing the latest harmonies from Carroll Gibbons, Ambrose, Joe Loss and Roy Fox. He never goes to bed until the dance bands have closed down for the night, and even then he tries to get America and Paul Whiteman's band, if he hasn't got a gramophone record he wants to hear

Nobody worries very much about this eccentricity. When the boy is at home we like him to feel happy; and as the house is an old one with thick walls and oak ceilings, the noise of music in the small hours of the night is not disturbing.

However, one night I woke up to a completely new sound. It went *plonk, plonk, plonk*—in different keys, and as it seemed to be coming from Edward's bedroom, I got up to remonstrate. I found him lying on the bed with his long legs crossed over bent knees, and a guitar pressed against his chest. He was strumming it in an abstracted, far-away fashion.

"Where on earth did you get that thing?" I inquired acidly.

A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

"Bought it in a pawnshop for ten bob."

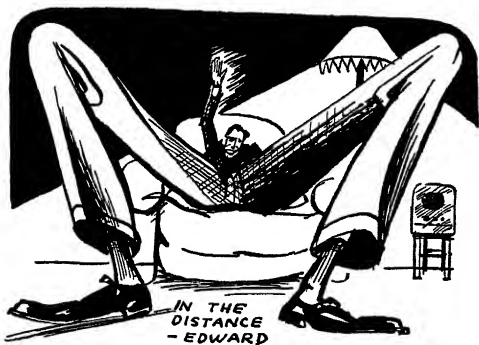
"Why?"

"It helps me to concentrate."

It was much too late to argue about concentration, so I grabbed the instrument and threatened to smash it over his head if he didn't go to sleep. But I didn't trust him not to start again, so I turned out the light and went back to bed with the guitar under my arm. It gave a hollow *plonk* when I put it on a chair, and Phoebe woke up instantly. "What's-s-s-matter?" she asked sleepily.

"Nothing. Only Edward keeping me awake by playing a guitar. I took it away from him."

"Oh, that!" Phoebe settled down to sleep



again. "He plays it because somebody told him he was like some musician—Gary Cooper, I think"

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

"Gary Cooper isn't a musician, he's a film star"

"He's a musician. Don't argue, George, it's too late go to sleep"

I didn't argue—I went to sleep, and it wasn't until *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* arrived in Marchester that I discovered Phoebe was quite right. Gary Cooper played an enormous tuba, a low-pitched kind of trombone, and played it so well that I was entranced. He has the part of a young bachelor living in a small town who is completely contented with his lot. He is the boss of a small factory, and his spare-time recreations are composing rhymes for picture postcards, and playing his tuba in the town band.

This uneventful existence suits Gary, until his life is suddenly invaded by a deputation from New York, consisting of Douglas Dumbrille and Lionel Stander, who inform him that his uncle has died, leaving him a vast fortune. Such news would stagger most people, but it doesn't interest Gary much; in fact, he declares his intention of giving the money away because he doesn't need it.

But he has to travel to New York all the same, to sign the necessary papers, so the town band gives him a great send-off at the station. They play "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," but the tune wouldn't sound right without Gary's tuba in the bass parts, so he helps to play himself off—an unforgettable scene which puts Gary Cooper in the front rank of stars.

A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW



COIA

GARY COOPER

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

In New York he lives in his uncle's house, a very grand mansion complete with butlers and servants ; but he immediately becomes the target of all the crooks and grafters in the city. They are all after his money, but with the childlike, naïve simplicity of his honest character, Gary manages to hold his own until he rescues Jean Arthur from desolation in the streets. It is a frame-up. Jean is a news-hawk on the staff of one of the papers. Her editor has promised her a month's vacation, with pay, if she will exploit the young millionaire and write front-page stories about his simple eccentricities. Jean sets out to accomplish this object with all the professional enthusiasm of a cute news-hawk. She gains Gary's confidence and leads him on until he has become her slave. And all the time, behind his back, she is contributing unkind articles to her paper and raising a stir of interest which makes the unsuspecting Gary the joke of New York.

At this point the story suddenly becomes very romantic and beautiful. Gradually, as Jean observes the fine character of the man she is exploiting, she finds herself employed in despicable work. After he has declared his love for her (a very moving scene in which Gary is so elated at his first kiss from Jean that he knocks over the dustbin in his long stride as he rushes away from her) she can't go on with the job. She remembers her parents, who loved each other simply and sincerely for a lifetime ; and she recognises in Gary the same qualities of honesty and sincerity.

A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

She decides to tell her lover how she has been deceiving him, and to beg his forgiveness, but—he finds out all about her first, from another source. The blow is a staggering one for the young man, who has already enshrined Jean in his heart as the woman of his dreams. He determines to return home to the country to nurse his grief, and would have done so but for a curious incident which gives him a new interest in life. He devotes his vast fortune to the good of humanity instead of using it himself.



Gary's crook lawyers are appalled when they see him signing away his money to down-and-out farmers. Their own chance of grabbing it is fading, so by a scurrulous trick they endeavour to have him certified insane. A court assembles to pass the necessary judgment which will have the young man locked away in an asylum.

The court scene is long, but it grips. At first things look black as ink for Gary, but suddenly they take a turn for the better owing to the courage of Jean Arthur as a witness. She denounces her own shameful deception. In the course of the evidence she admits she loves Gary, and this news stimulates him to such an extent that he defends himself brilliantly, and eventually the court pronounces in his favour.

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Of course the ending finds Jean Arthur caught up in a rapturous embrace. She seems almost able to give as much as she takes in the kissing stakes with Gary, but not quite, for he seems to be winning at the fade-out. This fade-out is one of the cleverest things Mr. Frank Capra has done, for the notes of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," as played on the tuba by Gary, boom out once more, and produced such a burst of joyous laughter from the audience as I have seldom heard in a cinema before.

As we let ourselves in at the front door, Phoebe said: "Now that I come to think of it, Edward James *is* a little like Gary Cooper; he has some of the same whimsical and very lovable mannerisms"

She stopped short as a deep booming noise came from the sitting-room. Edward James looked up from behind a huge brass instrument as we entered, and greeted us cheerfully. "Hello, Mum, hello, Pop," he said. "What do you think of this? I swapped my guitar, some gramophone records and five bob for it. Listen."

We listened while a tune of some sort emerged. It wasn't in the same class as Musician Gary Cooper, but it wasn't bad.

The only stipulation I made was that the tuba was not to be practised in the bedroom. Otherwise the boy can copy Gary Cooper as much as he likes, for I think he's a jolly good fellow.

TIME MARCHES—ON !

THOUGH it might be an exaggeration to say that *we all go to the pictures* in our neighbourhood, it is safe to assert that the majority of the population goes very often. We can't help ourselves sometimes, because the manager of the Grand Cinema looks after us so thoroughly. He studies our individual tastes to the point of sending out postcards to the people he knows will be interested in the programmes. I get two postcards regularly every week, but there are some people who come long distances in motor cars and charabancs, in the spirit of sublime trust and obedience.

I was not at all surprised, therefore, to find Mr. Jones, the Marchester grocer (who is such a confirmed Myrna Loy "fan" that he neglected his business to follow *The Thin Man* about the country and became quite a thin man himself in the process) waiting impatiently in the vestibule for the second performance of *Petticoat Fever*.

"Well, Old Timer—what's on your mind?" I exclaimed, shaking him warmly by the hand.

Mr. Jones looked a trifle sheepish. "I ain't seen *her* since Whipsnade, six months ago," he whispered excitedly.

"Whipsnade? You mean *Whipsaw*, my friend. Whipsnade's a Zoological Gardens."

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Mr. Jones smiled at his mistake in a pained manner. "Slip of the tongue that was. Zoo . . . tut, tut! You couldn't imagine Miss Loy in a zoo, could you?"



"Only in the Pets' Corner,"

I replied, chuckling, but we had no time to discuss the subject further, for the crowds began to move and Mr. Jones was in such a hurry to get inside I lost sight of him. Judging by the muttered protests of people in the queue, I surmised he must be pushing and shoving a good

deal to get a seat in front. In such circumstances conscience goes by the board.

Anyhow, Mr. Jones had his reward (and so had I), for Myrna Loy looks very well in *Petticoat Fever*. In fact, so well and lovely does she look, even after making a forced landing in an aeroplane at the very door of his outpost wireless-station in the arctic regions of Labrador, that Robert Montgomery becomes quite unhinged at the sight of her.

Which is not to be wondered at under the circumstances, for Robert is a wireless operator who has not seen a pretty woman for two years owing to the isolated nature of his job. That he is suffering from this deficiency before Myrna Loy arrives so unexpectedly, is obvious. He

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roams about his living-room in a restless manner, playing with catapults, throwing himself from one chair to another, and shouting and storming at his Esquimo servant. Even the sudden appearance of Sir James Fenton (Reginald Owen), from the wrecked aeroplane, fails to interest him at first until he hears that Sir James is not alone. There is a woman in the 'plane as well, is there! What ho! . . . Robert awakes from his lethargy. In the twinkling of an eye he becomes the alert and romantic host.

Robert Montgomery is always at his best when he meets a pretty woman for the first time. His colossal conceit and his impudent bearing, together with his good looks and well-cut clothes, always see him over the first few hurdles very successfully. In this case, although she has every reason to believe he is crazy, Myrna soon becomes fascinated by a gay young man who is such a contrast to her heavy, pompous fiancé, Sir James.

An amusing triangle comedy at once commences. Robert's tactics are to take Myrna by storm regardless of her engagement ring, and Reginald Owen is left to defend his property to the best of his ability. Each man schemes to be alone with the lovely Myrna, and there is a lot of dashing from one room to another, which is reminiscent of *Private Lives*. Both Robert and Reginald, indeed, seem to think it quite right and proper to crash into poor Myrna's bedroom on the slightest pretext, quite regardless of the stage of toilette in

which she might be engaged, but this, of course, is legitimate in comedy. Not that Myrna seems to mind. She is more than a match for them either singly or together.

But the prevailing atmosphere is jealousy, and this is cleverly created and maintained by Reginald Owen. It is beyond a joke to have this young whipper-snapper making love to his girl, and who could blame him for displaying a lot of nasty temper? Even if his personality is that of pompous middle-age, we can't help feeling just a little sympathy for the man at having such a lovely prize snatched from beneath his eyes.

For Myrna is delightful. Even in this Arctic setting she is able to wear pretty evening dresses (her suitcases were uninjured in the crash, fortunately), and to look as graceful as she knows how. The dialogue is rapid, and she imparts the necessary fire to it when she gets the opportunity, even to the extent of passionately accusing Robert Montgomery of petticoat fever as the root cause of his crazy conduct. And even when Winifred Shotter arrives to proclaim that she has been engaged to Robert for two years, she maintains that perfect dignity.

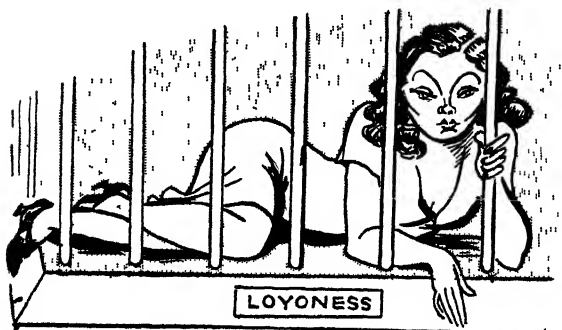
The plot is unmasked before the end of course, when we discover Winifred to be a scheming person who has had advance news that Robert is inheriting a title and estates. It is an unsympathetic part for her, but she acts it well. The story ends with Robert Montgomery going after

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the disillusioned Myrna like a whirlwind, and saving her just in time from a marriage with Reginald Owen. In the best "Montgomery tradition" Myrna is snatched away from the very arms of her fiancé, and the last we see of her is when she is jumping from ice-floe to ice-floe hand-in-hand with her new playboy.

On the way out I again encountered Mr. Jones in the vestibule. He was holding his bowler hat in one hand and scratching his head with the other. "Blimey," he said, "W'ot'll that girl be up to next I'd like to know? Makes me kinda scared to watch her jumping about on the ice like that . . . and sliding and falling till she might hurt herself"

"Maybe she'll be more careful in future pictures



. . . now that she's married," I hazarded.

Mr. Jones looked solemn and replaced his hat on his head. "Fancy *her* married," he said

TIME MARCHES—ON !

sorrowfully. "And me watching her grow up ever since she was a little girl. Why I remember her with Valentino in *What Price Beauty*, and it seems only yesterday"

"Time marches—on !" I remarked, imitating the voice of the announcer in the American news-feature. It seemed the only crumb of comfort I could offer.

CUPID IN AMBUSH.

ABOUT this time of the year Phoebe and Jane always seem to discover that they "haven't a thing to wear," so they disappear to London to see what they can do about it in Oxford Street. With equal regularity, while they are away, some domestic disaster occurs in the home.

One day I was eating my solitary lunch when Sally, our "Tweeny," rushed in to say the house was blowing up. It looked very like it at first, when I reached the kitchen. The place was full of steam, and terrible jittering, gurgling noises were coming from the sink. Hot water was boiling out of a tap in great gushes, but when I tried to turn it off it got worse.

After some effort we stopped the trouble temporarily by tying string round a loose joint, and then, to save further disaster, we raked out the fire in the kitchen range and telephoned for help.

When "Jimmy Handley," the plumber, arrived, he congratulated us on our presence of mind. (His real name isn't Jimmy Handley, but he is so like the famous young actor that everyone calls him that, and he accepts the honour with befitting modesty.)

This wasn't merely a matter of a new washer, said Jimmy, after inspection. The inside of the old tap was worn out, and nothing would do but a

CUPID IN AMBUSH

new tap, and fortunately he had one in his bag. While I acted as a cork, by pressing a piece of wood into the pipe and holding it there, Jimmy proceeded



JIMMY ON TAP

with the work, shouting instructions to Sally, who was handing him the tools he required in the manner of a plumber's mate. Between spasms of effort Jimmy discussed the pictures.

"Seen the Quins this week?" he enquired brightly. We shook our heads. "Seen Leslie Howard and Bette Davis in *The Petrified Forest*?" Again we shook our heads.

It transpired that Jimmy hadn't seen the week's programme either. He liked Bette Davis and wanted to see her in *The Petrified Forest*, but the idea of *The Country Doctor* as a supporting picture, scared him. "T'aint natural," he announced firmly.

At this point Sally, who had been holding a hammer, dropped it on Jimmy's toe, which caused him to jump against my arm. My "cork" blew out of the pipe, and once more we were enveloped in clouds of steam. By the time we had things under control again, Jimmy had forgotten all about the pictures.

But Sally hadn't. "W'ot ain't natural?" she inquired.

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The plumber's mind relaxed at once. "Them Quins ain't natural, not on the pictures, anyways. All right for girls and women maybe, but no good for men. Good murder mystery's w'ot I likes, plenty of hot lead."

By this time the new tap was in position, and I was relieved of my official duties as the plug. I left them both to finish off the details, while I washed the dirt off myself. Then I tried to settle down to some work, but somehow Jimmy Handley's remarks about the Quins and *The Petrified Forest* had tickled my imagination. I decided to go and see this problem programme at first hand.

The fact that Leslie Howard and Bette Davis were in the leading rôles of *The Petrified Forest* was quite sufficient in itself to make the picture interesting. Leslie is a young writer, an idealist, a dreamer, whose married life had been unhappy. He had sailed for the United States because his wife had left him for another man, and we first meet him tramping alone in the Arizona desert. He is friendless and almost destitute, but happy in his own way at having thrown over the trammels of civilization.

The atmosphere of the wind-swept, dust-filled desert is wonderfully conveyed, and when Leslie stumbles into a wayside petrol station and meets Bette Davis, the daughter of the proprietor, a queer sense of mystery is conveyed. Bette is unhappy in such an environment. She paints pictures, reads poetry, and hates the drab routine

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of serving hot dogs to passing travellers. In Leslie she sees the man she has always longed to meet, and she falls in love with him at first sight.

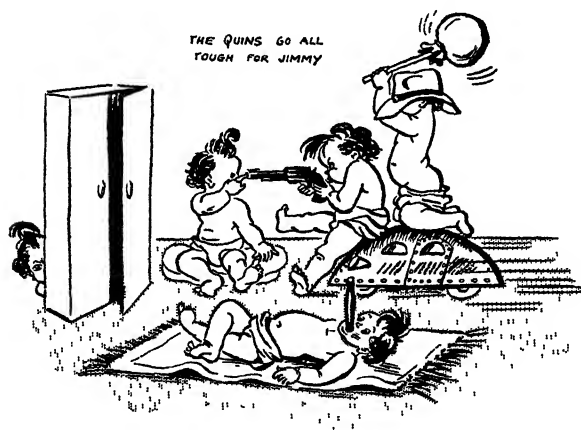
There are complications, of course. A gang of desperadoes, with Humphrey Bogart as their chief, take possession of the petrol station. They are real killers, but in spite of very clever acting, the film at this point becomes a photographed stage play, and (what is very rare nowadays), deserts the cinema technique. All the players are made to sit round tables in the eating-room of the petrol station, and, while a sand-storm rages outside, they discuss love and life in a detached sort of way. Leslie Howard makes long philosophical speeches, while Bette has little to do except gaze at him with those lovely big eyes of hers, in silent admiration. It is all very unreal, yet somehow fascinating, this long scene ; but all the time I felt myself longing for Leslie Howard to do something rather than talk so much. If he had taken Bette in his arms and made love to her, or tackled the gangsters in a terrific gun battle, I would have been better pleased. As it is, the film ends on the same note of idealism, for after sacrificing himself so that Bette will be able to draw his insurance money and thus become free to travel and study her art, Leslie dies by the hand of Humphrey Bogart, while Bette holds his head in her arms and murmurs poetry.

As a contrast, it was quite a relief when the supporting picture commenced, and we were introduced to *The Country Doctor*. Here is a story

CUPID IN AMBUSH

presented in almost purely narrative form, about the history of the astounding Dionne family from birth. The screen is literally the only medium which could portray such a drama of human life, and if at times it was educative rather than entertaining, the fact remains that it is more important for human beings to know about the Quins than it is for them to see films about the life and habits of the bee, or about birds emigrating in the winter time.

Jean Hersholt as Dr. John Luke, gives an amazing performance, as does John Qualen in the part of the harassed father of the Quins. The scene in the



hut the night the children are born, with Slim Summerville standing by to render assistance, is unforgettable. So is the nursery scene, where the

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Dionne Quintuplets (with very little help from Jean Hersholt) entertain us for several minutes with their pranks. The film is unique, just as its little subjects are unique, and though I can't say I would like to see it twice, I felt very glad as I walked home that, in spite of Jimmy Handley's caustic remarks, I'd had the courage to go and see it once.

Sally, the "Tweeny," seemed rather hurried over the supper dishes when I returned. She appeared anxious for me to start the meal when I wanted to smoke a pipe and listen to the radio news, and fidgeted so much that at last I asked her why I should have my supper at least half-an-hour earlier than usual.

Sally blushed and twisted the end of her apron. She said she would like to go out that evening, if I had no objection. She said it wasn't her night out normally, but she had all her work done. She said she wanted to see the *Petrified Forest*, and that Mr. Handley, the plumber, had invited her to go with him. "He's waiting in the kitchen now," said Sally. "He came back to see if the new tap was all right."

"That ain't natural," I said with a grin.

Sally blushed.

"Don't let him out till he's seen the Quins," I added as she fled away to her boy-friend.

ANY TIME'S KISSING TIME

MY future daughter-in-law, Prunella Morgan, had not been to see us for some time, so Phoebe suggested I should meet her in London, and bring her down for a short holiday. "She's working too hard in that film studio," announced Phoebe, "and when she has any time off she goes dashing about with Edward. You must persuade her to leave them both behind and come down here for a rest."

Prunella said she didn't want a rest, when I met her for lunch in a restaurant. Nor did she look as if she had been over-working. Dressed in a slick beige tunic, slit here and there with black jet buttons, I thought I had never seen her look more charming. Her glorious red hair was adorned with a kind of black felt helmet going up into a sharp point; and her wide grey eyes were convincing evidence of a healthy life. However, when we reached the coffee stage I delivered Phoebe's message.

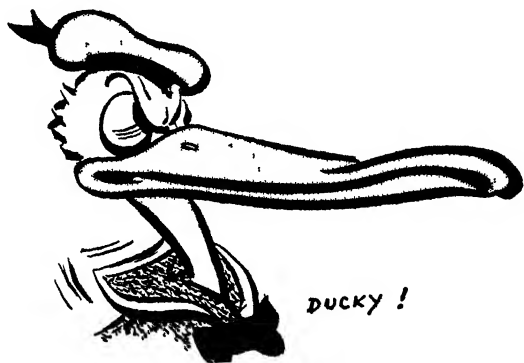
"It's sweet of you," said Prunella, "but I couldn't get away just now, Pop. The only holiday I have time for is a busman's one. Will you take me to the pictures this afternoon?"

"Sure!" I cried, delighted. "What would you like to see?"

"Something that has kissing in it—*Dangerous*, for preference.

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

When we got to the cinema Mickey Mouse was performing in a cartoon called *On Ice*. He was engaged in giving little Minnie some skating



lessons, and the manner in which he saved her posterior from disaster, by the timely use of a cushion, set us both off chuckling heartily. Then joy of joys, Donald the Duck appears and immediately starts getting into mischief! He finds Pluto, the hound, fast asleep and fixes skates on his paws. Pluto's reactions to this prank are exceptionally funny. In fact, it is a very well-balanced little picture in every way. The "noises off" are so perfectly timed that they have all the rhythm of a Silly Symphony. In the end Mickey Mouse saves the impudent Donald from a fate which he has earned—though it would be a poorer world without that diabolical bird.

ANY TIME'S KISSING TIME



WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Next came the big picture—*Dangerous*, with Bette Davis as an eerie stimulant. There is a bar-room scene to start with, in which Bette as a famous actress, has gone to the dogs beyond redemption. Bette's acting in this is so good that the effect is simply harrowing, and when Franchot Tone finds her, remembering the inspiration she had been to him in her heyday, it is an extremely emotional moment. He takes her to his country cottage, on the principle that one good turn deserves another, and a reclaiming process begins, which is "dangerous" to say the least of it. When Bette had regained her normal vital, sensuous charm, we knew that Franchot Tone hadn't got an earthly. It was a very awkward situation for him, of course, to have a vamp come into his life in this manner. Previously he has lived in a conventional world, he is a successful architect with social connections, he is engaged to marry the equally conventional Margaret Lindsay. Yet here he is, sinking into the slime against his better judgment, for no other reason than that he had befriended a woman in distress; a woman who had victimized dozens of men before him, a woman whose ill-luck had been communicated to everyone who came in contact with her either in life or on the stage.

For a while it looked as if Franchot Tone was going to be just another victim. He neglects his work, loses big contracts, breaks off his engagement with Margaret Lindsay, and returns time and

ANY TIME'S KISSING TIME

again to his country cottage and—Bette! There are some very poignant emotional scenes between them, and some of the love-shots are as passionate as the director dare allow. In fact, it is easy to understand why Bette Davis was awarded the Motion Picture Academy medal. She's a girl who lets herself go. Like Elizabeth Bergner, she is an adept at creating "atmosphere."

The story works out to a happy ending, though not a very satisfactory one. Bette discovers that her love for Franchot is a bigger and a better thing than she had ever experienced before, and she makes the great sacrifice of giving him up to Margaret Lindsay. Self-sacrifice also leads her to a riddance of the devils with which she had been possessed, and she regains her former great position as an actress of world repute.

It seems a tame finish, after the emotions we had been through previously, but right up to the very last moment Bette plays her part with a beautiful sympathy and understanding. Yet she leaves the feeling that even while the organ is playing the wedding march for Margaret, if she waved her pretty hand, Franchot would leave his bride and come trotting back. He would, too, but, of course, the director couldn't leave it that way.



AFTER 467 KISSES

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Prunella said she thought so, too, when I mentioned how I felt about the film. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds," she exclaimed, "and the technique of the kissing was marvellous. I guess I ought to know, because I spent all day yesterday watching kissing."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

Prunella's wide, honest grey eyes regarded me gravely. "Maybe you'll think me a fraud, Pop," she said rather wistfully, "but the fact is I'm not working in a film just now. I have a job as 'stand in' to a star, and the director is trying to find a young actor to play opposite. He must be good at kissing, so several young men are being tried out for the part. Each test takes three hours, and at the end of yesterday's work the script clerk announced that the star had been kissed 467 times."

"Good heavens!" I said again, unable to comprehend such alarming figures. "Isn't she getting worn out?"

Prunella's eye brightened. "She IS!" she said triumphantly, "that's why I daren't take a holiday just now; she's beginning to show signs of wear and tear; she's complaining of a pain in the neck. I may step into the part any time now"

"But you won't have had enough practice in kissing," I objected.

"Oh yes, I will," she protested, blushing slightly. "I practise with Edward in my spare time."

ANYTHING GOES—FOR JANE

OUR Jane had not been her usual bright self for a week, so the family guessed there was a Bing Crosby film somewhere in the offing. Ever since Bing first entered Jane's life (it started with the film called *Mississippi*) she has been "that way" about him, and the only plan to even things up when she happened to be in one of her cheeky moods was to resort to a game we called "Bing-baiting Jane."

The rules were quite simple. You crooned a few bars of the latest sentimental ditty, and rolled your eyes around at the same time (Edward was particularly good at this). Or else you sat on a stool with a soulful expression and blew out your cheeks. Whatever you did, Jane soon recognised that "Bing-baiting" was in progress, and ran from the room covered with blushes.

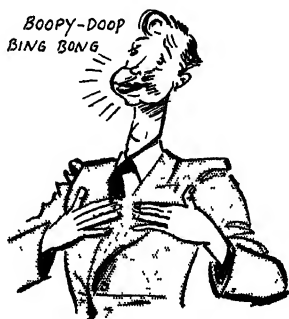
Phoebe stopped it, however, in her usual motherly way, when we were really in danger of hurting Jane's feelings. "Every girl goes through that sort of thing," she explained to me privately, "so it isn't fair to tease her, George." She sighed deeply before continuing: "In my young days we used to get 'stage struck,' which was worse, because there was always a flesh-and-blood actor

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

in the background. In my case, I remember, it was Owen Nares”

“So what?” I enquired, for this was the first time Phoebe had confessed to a secret passion.

“Oh, you needn’t be jealous, it only lasted until somebody told me he was married and had two children. And then I saw him in some play which didn’t suit him, I can’t even remember the name of it now, and my youthful dreams were shattered. I stopped sighing every time Owen’s name was mentioned.”



EDWARD EMULATES BING

“That’s a good idea!” I exclaimed. “If we take Jane to see *Anything Goes*, maybe that will cure her. The songs are getting a bit hackneyed by this time, and Bing Crosby’s glamour may be wearing rather thin.”

And so the matter was arranged, very tactfully by Phoebe, though I could see that Jane would have preferred to sneak off to the cinema by herself, to sit alone with her secret sorrow in the back row of the circle.

Bing Crosby is certainly a very engaging young man, but I confess I forgot about him (and about Jane’s problem, too), when Charles Ruggles was on the screen. Disguised as a clergyman, I found

ANYTHING GOES—FOR JANE



BING <ROSBY

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him even funnier than usual, which is saying a mouthful, for as a rule, I don't like comedians masquerading as parsons. Not that I'm straight-laced, but merely because they usually cultivate a sing-song voice and overdo the "dearly beloved brethren" business, besides wearing a dog collar several sizes too large. But Charles Ruggles as "Public Enemy No. 13," escaping from the "G-men" in the States, disguised as the Rev. Doctor Moon, makes the part a scream. He is clean-shaven and unassuming, but every now and then his gangster tendencies get the upper hand, producing some very comical interludes.

Bing Crosby and Ida Lupino balance the picture by supplying all the sentiment. Bing has been seeing his business partner off to England, but a chance meeting with Ida before the ship sails causes him to remain on board without ticket or luggage or passport. Fortunately (or unfortunately) for him the Rev. Moon is able to provide him with everything he wants, but the borrowed passport is in the name of "Public Enemy No. 1," who should have been sailing on the boat, so Bing finds himself to be a "wanted" man by the officials. He goes through amazing adventures in his attempts to make contact with Ida, though usually when he finds her there is only enough time to sing one of his tuneful melodies.

Under Hollywood influence Ida Lupino is becoming a very pretty girl, indeed. She has not

ANYTHING GOES—FOR JANE

much to do in this picture, except look decorative in lovely clothes, and the number of lines she has to speak are very few. But there is no doubt that she is making good in films, she's such a plucky little girl, and the family talent will probably see her through to more important parts in future.

Even Bing Crosby's singing and Ida Lupino's beauty could not have saved *Anything Goes* from being just an average film, but for the superb clowning of Charlie Ruggles. Whether he is conversing on missions in China, about which he knows nothing; or kidnapping a small dog to shave its hair off and provide himself with a false beard; or playing cards with his Chinese "convert"; or shooting clay pigeons with a machine-gun—he manages to put the humour of the scene across. Which is no easy matter, for the "book" of adapted musical comedy is a very different medium to the "book" of a film like *Ruggles of Red Gap*. Nor has he the clever assistance usually rendered by his partner, Mary Boland.

The only thing which seemed a pity about *Anything Goes* was the scene on Southampton docks, when the ship arrived in England. On the landing-stage of the busy port, a sort of Chinese review was arranged, and even though we were not supposed to take this seriously, it seemed to me to be incongruous. And for some obscure reason the director ordained that the audience on the docks should view this show in pouring rain.

It was raining when we got out of the cinema,

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and Phoebe was annoyed that she hadn't brought an umbrella, for she had planned to call at Gertie Vereker's house on the way home to tell her about some tea-party or something. But Jane was quite cheerful, and said she would go instead as she had on her tweeds and heavy shoes and didn't mind getting wet. She trudged off whistling "You're the Top," and apparently was her own bright self.

"Just what I said," I announced proudly. "She's probably getting over Bing Crosby now. There's no need to worry." However, we worried a little when she didn't appear for supper, and wondered if anything could have happened to the child.

The telephone soon put us at our ease. It was Claude Vereker ringing up to say that Jane had stayed for supper at his house. "We're taking her to the pictures afterwards," he shouted (he is one of those people who think everyone is deaf when he's speaking on the telephone), "so don't expect her home till late."

"The pictures!" I gasped.

"Yes, the pictures!" roared Claude. "You don't mind, do you? She says she'd like to see Bing Crosby in *Anything Goes*."

I said I'd heard it was a very good picture, and hoped they'd all enjoy it—especially Jane.

ON WINGS OF . . . CHARITY

THE cinemas in our neighbourhood rarely achieve *gala* performances, so when the manager of the "Regal" at Marchester announced that all the takings for the opening matinée of *On the Wings of Song* would be devoted to charity, the community was somewhat startled. Everyone began to ask everyone else if they were going, and the Vicar's wife took charge of the box-office as if it were a jumble sale.

I had no intention of missing Grace Moore's visit, whether in the cause of charity or otherwise. I saw *One Night of Love* four times, and I would be quite prepared to see it four times more. Therefore, because of my admiration for Grace Moore, I knew I would go to *On the Wings of Song*, but I did not perceive the necessity of paying double prices for a *gala* show just because the Marchester Welfare Society was to benefit by its performance.

Phoebe, however, had other views. She said we would have to go to the matinée because it was her first chance to wear a new tailored suit she had bought in the sales. "You'll like it, George," she coaxed.

"Of course I'll like it," I argued. "Who could help liking such a glorious girl as Grace Moore? She's the finest operatic singer in the world. . . ."

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

"I mean you'll like my tailor-made. It has a schoolboy jacket curving away below three buttons, and it buttons quite high on the chest, and . . .

and . . . that reminds me, you'll have to wear your blue suit."



POP AFTER FOUR NIGHTS OF
LOVE ON WINGS OF SONG!

"It isn't a garden party, it's a film," I expostulated; but argument was no use. I suppose it was weak of me, but I capitulated for peace sake.

When we eventually arrived at the cinema (Phoebe only took $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours to dress, and the result was certainly very fetching) there were already a number of people in their places. The mayor sat in the stalls with a gold chain round his neck. Babe, the manager, was fussing about in a tail coat and white tie, we were given printed programmes and all the lights were blazing. In fact, there was a general air of expectancy more like a circus than a cinema.

Our seats were about the middle of the circle, and we had scarcely settled into them when Phoebe commenced that devastating habit of greeting people in other parts of the house. When a woman knows she is well dressed, it seems to me she'll smile at anyone. First there were the Huntingdons in the sixth row, who started nodding and smiling brightly, and then there was a man

ON WINGS OF CHARITY



WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

who raised his hand and waved. When I enquired who he was, Phoebe said she didn't know, but she nodded and waved and smiled back at him as if he were a lifelong friend. I soon got bored with all this nodding and smiling, and started glancing about the audience independently. There was a woman sitting in the second row at the side, with one of those peaked jockey caps pulled over her left ear and a rather attractive collection of little blonde curls neatly waved up behind. Much to my surprise she smiled at me warmly and fluttered a programme, so I smiled, too, and waved because there seemed nothing else to do, until I saw Phoebe staring at me with a sort of *congealed* expression on her face. She said, "That woman!" in a sort of hissing voice, and then the lights went down.

It didn't really matter, because Grace Moore was soon the only woman deserving attention. In a few minutes she was carolling like a lark in a setting of winter sports in Switzerland, and the audience was entranced. Great heavens, how that girl can sing! The effortless way she takes a top note must be the envy of every prima donna in Europe. And while she is singing she always *looks* so lovely that it is hard to associate her with prima donnas at all.

I confess I didn't think much of the story. It is much the same theme as *One Night of Love*, but Leo Carrillo is not half so convincing as was Tullio Carminati. To begin with, he is not the

ON WINGS OF CHARITY

"type" that a girl like Grace would fall for normally, but then you never can tell what a girl will do when she is young, gifted, beautiful and so full of the joy of life that she's just got to love somebody. She made poor Carrillo suffer a lot before he won her, and up to the very last moment we are not quite sure whether he isn't going to get a bullet in his neck instead, but that part of the film doesn't really count. What did was that Grace herself attained the heights of the Metropolitan Opera House, and then sang in "La Boheme."

When it was over Phoebe had to hurry off and help the Vicar's wife count the takings, and I didn't come to earth again for a long time. The mayor made a speech thanking the manager, and the manager made a speech thanking the mayor, and then Lady Summerdale, as President of the Marchester Welfare Society, made a speech thanking both the mayor and the manager, and there was a lot of clapping and fluttering. The only speech I heard was a low, musical voice saying, "How very nice to see you again," and I at once recognized the woman who had smiled and waved at me before the lights went out. It was Mrs. Prince-Mills, the widow, who had been



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so kind to me when I was in bed with a sprained ankle. I hadn't seen her since. She said, wasn't Grace Moore adorable? I said, yes. She said she thought Leo Carrillo was too-too Italian, or didn't I think so? She said Luis Alberni was *really* the funniest man, and wasn't Michael Bartlett's singing simply divine?

In fact, she said a lot of things while we sat behind the palms waiting for Phoebe in the vestibule, and I was awfully pleased I had decided to wear my blue suit. I hope the manager will have another gala performance soon; it's a fine way of helping a charity!

EDWARD ARNOLD SHOWS GEORGE HOW TO SLIM

WILD horses wouldn't drag me to have my photograph taken again. It was Grannie's idea to start with, otherwise it would never have happened. Grannie is Phoebe's mother, and she has the "family" instinct somewhat over-developed. On her 73rd birthday she discovered that she had photos of all the members, except me. Arguing with the old girl is never any use—I just had to go and have mine taken.

The lady photographer placed me on a chair in a sort of no-man's-land of twisted wire. She had about ten high-powered lamps all blazing together, but when everything seemed ready, one of them would make a hissing noise and go out. "Mercy!" the lady would cry, as she hurled herself at it and rattled the carbons about. It was mercy I needed, as I sat getting hotter and hotter, no longer wondering why film stars are paid high salaries.

When at last she said: "Now are we all readikins?" or something that photographers say to a restless infant, I was past caring. I wouldn't have been in the least surprised if she'd added "Peekaboo! Just a little smile now. Iddums, didums,"—but she hadn't even a teddy bear for me to look at, or a canary in a cage!

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The resulting picture was a cross between Nat Pendleton, Robertson Hare and Ted Healey, featuring all their less pleasant expressions. I



GEORGE MELTS FOR A STILL

I had bulging eyes, pouchy cheeks and a glazed look in my eyes like Ned Sparks. Grannie, in acknowledgment, said I looked tired and ill, and she feared I had got fat. Considering all the trouble I had gone to I thought this criticism rather unfair, but when Phoebe, after a horrified look at the portrait, agreed with Grannie and said: "You *are* getting fat you know, George; you'll have to do something about it," the remark struck me with a sharp impact.

What I did do about it surprised even myself—I joined Phoebe on a diet. She was just starting a new one (she's always starting a new one, but she never sticks to it very long), and I said if I really looked as bad as the photo made me out, I was prepared to lend practical support to any form of beauty treatment. Phoebe warned me the diet was a severe one and I wouldn't like it, but nothing would stop me.

I began at once. I breakfasted off raw apples and biscuits that tasted like sawdust. I lunched off poached eggs and spinach (ugh!). I dined off boiled cod-fish and more sawdust.

ARNOLD SHOWS HOW TO SLIM



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The menu varied a little from day to day, of course. Once we had a regular blow-out off grape-nuts, and another day we had a dish of stewed prunes as a treat because it was the fourth day or something, and a little relaxation was permitted.

We must have looked as dull as we felt, because the Vicar dropped in and nearly fainted when he heard we hadn't been to the pictures. "I've never known you to miss a picture at Marchester before," he exclaimed.

"We haven't been feeling like going," said Phoebe lamely.

"But it's *Diamond Jim*!" said the Vicar. "You simply mustn't miss such a wonderful film. Edward Arnold is magnificent, and the story has an excellent moral—I'm going to take it for my text on Sunday."

And then the Vicar proceeded to tell us a long rigmarole about *Diamond Jim Brady* (portrayed by Edward Arnold): how he became wealthy and famous, and loved to load his friends with presents, or to purchase diamonds for the adornment of his person. And how he had a kind heart, but money couldn't accomplish everything, especially when it came to Love. Here the Vicar became solemn and professional. There were two women in Edward Arnold's life, he said in a hushed voice: Binnie Barnes and Jean Arthur. Jean was the one he wanted to marry, but although he loaded her with diamonds she couldn't bring herself to be

ARNOLD SHOWS HOW TO SLIM

anything but a friend. And then Binnie Barnes wouldn't marry the poor fellow either, although he had established her career on the stage by spending money lavishly so that she could qualify as a star.

Phoebe stifled a yawn, for one of the worst things about a diet is that you're always sleepy.

"Why wouldn't she marry him?" she said.

The Vicar explained that that was the part of the film which puzzled him. He thought all the time that Binnie would rally in the end, but she hadn't. Indeed, the reason he had come in to see us was to get some illumination on this point. He didn't quite know what to say about Binnie in his sermon, but he certainly felt she *ought* to have married Edward Arnold. He was a little bit disappointed in her, although in previous films he had always thought the world of Binnie Barnes.

We promised we would go to try to clear up the mystery.

I shall remember *Diamond Jim* as long as I live. The sight of Edward Arnold getting down to four dozen oysters, followed by a plate of turtle soup, a Dover sole, a roast pheasant, a sirloin of beef (and three veg.), a treacle pudding, a savoury, and cheese and biscuits—made me so hungry, I felt I could eat the upholstery off the leather-backed seats. I have grateful recollections of Binnie Barnes and Jean Arthur, looking as alluring as always, and playing their parts sympathetically, especially in the wedding-breakfast scene where

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Arnold and Jean *eat* as they talk. In this scene Arnold waved a chicken drumstick about in a way that made me feel physically weak. I experienced all the sensations of a small boy with no pennies, gazing hungrily at sausages frying in the window of a supper bar.

I tried to concentrate my mind on the problem of why Binnie Barnes doesn't marry Edward Arnold, but without success. I guess she just didn't want to, and that was all there was to say about it.

When it was all over I guided Phoebe to the hospitable doors of the "Dragon."

"What are we going in here for?" she asked suspiciously.

..... AFTER "DIAMOND JIM"



"We must sit down for a while and discuss the picture so that we can help the Vicar with his sermon," I replied, but at that moment Sam, the waiter, greeted us politely.

ARNOLD SHOWS HOW TO SLIM

"What are you 'aving to-night, sir?" he enquired. "The saddle of lamb's very good, and there's some salmon mayonnaise, or maybe you'd prefer"

I interrupted: "Send in everything you've got, Sam—I'm going to eat myself to death, like Edward Arnold did."

"We'll die together then," said Phoebe, leading the way to the dining-room.

CHARLIE CHAN AT A JUMBLE SALE

EVER since the gala performance of *On the Wings of Song* at which the manager of the Royal Cinema in Marchester handed over all the takings for charity, our Vicar's wife has been trying to think up something new to raise money for the numerous philanthropic institutions in which she is interested. She proposed a flag-day to the Mayor, who described the suggestion as highway-robbery. She tried to get her husband to give a lantern-lecture, but he'd been had that way before. She implored the church organist to give a recital with community singing like the Granada at Tooting, but all he said was that the people of Tooting could sing. She called twice at our house to persuade me to run a local dog show.

As our dogs cause trouble enough with the neighbours' dogs, without gathering them all in a show together, I refused point blank, but Phoebe (always eager to be helpful), said: "Why don't you have a jumble sale?"

Phoebe wished afterwards she hadn't thought of this, for the Vicar's wife was thrilled to the marrow by the idea. She said she had some knickers of her daughter's that were too small, and might fetch something. She said Phoebe and Jane must have lots of old clothes they wouldn't

CHARLIE CHAN AT A SALE

miss. She said she'd noticed Edward James was growing out of his overcoat. She glanced sharply at my hat.

Now I have a hat of which I'm extremely fond. It is a soft felt, and when I bought it about 14 years ago, it was a beautiful fawn shade. Now it is green and perhaps a little battered, but it's a hat you can take to the pictures and not worry if people happen to sit on it. Even after Katherine Hepburn, our Dalmatian dog, had hidden it in her kennel for a week, it was quite wearable afterwards.



GEORGE'S "PICTURE" HAT

Imagine, then, my rage when I couldn't find my hat before leaving the house to see *Charlie Chan in Shanghai*. Phoebe and Edward had gone to the jumble sale, so I was alone in my search. Eventually I banged the door and went out hatless, and in a very bad temper.

I have been a Charlie Chan "fan" for years. There is something about the man that appeals to me quite apart from Warner Oland. He is like Sherlock Holmes, a legendary being come to life. I never think of him as a film actor just playing a part on the screen, but always as a real, courageous,

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resourceful character who will shuffle through some amazing adventures to a triumphant ending.

Charlie Chan never swanks. His modesty is one of his most delightful qualities ; while his quaint wise-cracks, many of them translated from original Chinese proverbs, are always very much to the point. In this story of *Charlie Chan in Shanghai*, a gang of opium traffickers are the villains who have been causing all the trouble. The British secret service agent, who is just on the point of unmasking the whole illicit trade, is kidnapped ; and Russell Hicks, one of the gang, cleverly impersonates him to put people off the scent. He succeeds in this, of course, except with Charlie. We know from the very start of every Charlie Chan picture that nothing in the world will put the Chinaman off the scent once he's on it.

In this picture about a great international plot in Shanghai, all kinds of red herrings are drawn across our path. A refreshing young man (Keye Luke) is introduced as Charlie's son, Lee Chan. He is also employed by the police department in helping father, but his main business in life seems to be making dates with his girl friends on the telephone. However, he causes us lots of entertainment, and when he disguises himself as an old beggar the situation becomes very amusing. Charlie takes a paternal interest in his offspring, but the boy is impetuous and needs a lot of looking after when there is dangerous work on hand.

CHARLIE CHAN AT A SALE



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Then there is Irene Harvey and her boy-friend, Charles Locher, in conventional parts designed to lead our interest into the wrong channels ; and, of course, a real Chief of Police (Halliwell Hobbes), who is the stupid, headstrong, official type, invariably jumping to conclusions based on slender evidence.

But in and out of the picture shuffles the indomitable Charlie Chan. Always in danger of death, always making our hairs creep at the risks he runs, ever watchful and alert. And when a situation has to be summed-up or explained, he can say in a sentence what it takes some film detectives ten minutes to say.

The end of *Charlie Chan in Shanghai* came all too soon for me. I suppose I must be a very guileless person, for it was quite a surprise to discover that Russell Hicks was the double-dyed villain all the time and not a partner of Charlie's in the secret service. Anyway, he was unmasked, and Charlie Chan triumphed once again.



* EXCUSE BACK, PLEASE
HUMBLE SERVANT TOO HUMBLE

I was so excited, I searched everywhere for my hat before I remembered that I had come away without it.

Phoebe was penitent but stern when I got home and complained that someone had taken away my favourite headpiece.

CHARLIE CHAN AT A SALE

"I took it to the jumble sale," she admitted, "and about time, too. It's a disgrace! You've been wearing that crumpled old thing for years, and going about looking like a tramp. I was thoroughly ashamed of you in it. The only way I could think of to make you buy a new one was to get rid of it."

She whisked out of the room leaving me to my misery.

Edward James came in whistling. "Humble offspring proffers gift," he said, in the best Charlie Chan tradition, and produced my hat from his coat pocket.

"Where did you find it?" I shouted joyfully.

"Humble offspring recognized paternal headgear on stall in jumble sale," he murmured. "Humble offspring acquire same, price threepence. Humble offspring hope for reward."

I was so pleased I gave him half-a-crown.

A DUMB GIRL FOR POP

MY charming prospective daughter-in-law, Prunella Morgan, is still with us, but rather subdued after experiencing a Sunday in the country. "It is so different in America," she sighed, shutting off a dismal radio programme. "We always have the Amateur Hour on Sundays in New York. Our National Broadcasting Company gets 10,000 applications a week from people who have a violent urge to show themselves off to the world. The Cinderella story becomes for many of them an actuality, because the public votes by telephone."

She then described how many of the foremost American artists got their first start that way. One fellow in particular, played on the clarinet and had a sort of dead-pan comic voice which he was able to put over on the air. He said in his dialogue with the announcer (quite unrehearsed) that he was a poultry farmer—raised eggs for a living; that he got to playing the clarinet because hens wouldn't lay in the winter-time and he had nothing to do. "I sort of figured that I could make more money playing this thing than I could laying eg—" Which produced such a big laugh that 18,000 people put in telephone calls to vote for him, and he is now famous as a music-hall comedian.

A DUMB GIRL FOR POP

"You should see the Amateur Hour in *Stars Over Broadway*, Pop," said Prunella, winking at Jane. "You would be interested."

"I haven't got time," I answered, recognising yet another plot to inveigle me into taking the family to the pictures at Marchester. (We've been going so much lately, it's becoming a financial strain.)

Prunella sighed again. "That's a pity," she said. "You'd like Jean Muir . . . and, of course, there's Marie Wilson."

"Marie Wilson!" I exclaimed, falling into the trap. "You mean the gooffy girl I saw in *Miss Pacific Fleet*? The dumb honey that squeaked and giggled? Why, I'd walk fifty miles to see her again, we must go to-morrow night."

After which statement there was such a roar of laughter from the entire family that I saw I had been caught out.

However, *Stars Over Broadway* was worth a lot of sacrifice. Pat O'Brien is a manager of entertainment stars, who has been let down badly and lost his business. When things are so black that he is contemplating suicide, he discovers in the hotel porter (James Melton) a young man with a marvellous natural voice. Pat takes him to a famous singing-master and pays for a long course of voice-training, for which he raises the money by working at menial jobs. The young man proves himself worth it, however, but the process is a slow one and money must be raised somehow. In the hope

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of getting his protégé on the air, Pat takes him to the National Broadcasting Company to try his luck with the amateurs.

This was my first introduction to the Amateur Hour, about which Prunella had been talking, and it was extremely amusing. Announcer Frank Fay was on the job, introducing performers to the mike, wisecracking, asking silly questions and sometimes getting backhand answers which weren't in the script.



"NO TALENT EXCEPT
FOR MARRIAGE"

The rest of the performers,

amongst whom sat Jean Muir, were on the platform displaying various stages of nervousness.

That particular evening was not destined to give James Melton his big chance. Pat O'Brien quarrelled with the announcer, and walked his man out of the studio. Not before he had met Jean Muir fortunately, and had been impressed by her quiet, restful charm. Jean won the third prize at the Amateur Hour, it transpired afterwards, when she seeks out Pat to find her work as a professional. Pat was now climbing up the ladder again, as James Melton's voice had been discovered and contracts were flowing in for his manager to deal with in a sumptuous office. Popping in and out, too, were Frank McHugh, a song-writer, and his girl-friend, Marie Wilson.

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These two were worth the admission money, by themselves. It isn't that they do anything in particular, and it isn't that they say anything remarkable, because they talk so quickly we couldn't catch half of the wisecracks. But somehow they are the perfect foils for each other, and you realise how much real acting there is in that dead-pan manner of Marie's, and how if she were not a very clever little actress the camera wouldn't pick her out the way it does the moment she walks on the screen. And the funniest thing about her is her profile, which she is an adept at showing in a whimsical way. It is strangely attractive, and sometimes it can be amazingly pretty.

Jean Muir's part is not a very important one, but she always proves herself to be a very competent young actress. The story continues rather to her disadvantage. She is so braced at having won the third prize at the Amateur Hour, that she tries to crash the stage, with Pat O'Brien's help, and to carve out a career for herself without the necessary talent. And all the time he is helping her, Pat is falling in love with this sweet, unsophisticated girl, but dare not say so out of loyalty to James Melton.



WHERE IN A HUFF

Success has not been a good thing for James. It

A DUMB GIRL FOR POP

has turned his head and he has taken to drink, broken his contracts, and run off the rails in a most disappointing fashion. Time and again he lets his manager down, until a crisis is reached and Pat O'Brien cannot stand it any longer. They part company after a quarrel, and it is at this point that the innocent, honest-to-goodness Jean Muir realises that she has no talent except for marriage ; but an extremely good one for that if the faithful Pat will be her man.

I said at supper afterwards, when we were discussing the film, that the only thing wrong with it was the director allowing Frank McHugh and Marie Wilson to get married. I said Marie wasn't the marrying sort, that you couldn't imagine a girl like that settling down to the humdrum of domestic life, that housekeeping would spoil her delicate butterfly character, that I simply couldn't imagine Marie cooking or washing-up dishes for instance

"Huh!" said Phoebe indignantly, gathering up some plates, "you don't seem to mind watching ME."

Prunella rushed in and calmed the troubled waters. "Men always get that way about dumb girls," she said soothingly. "I guess it's just because they're dumb."

Which profound statement we interpreted according to our wishes.

AFTER MANY YEARS

TEA parties are a form of entertainment that have very little appeal to me personally, and I usually manage to avoid them, but last Sunday I was caught by our neighbour, Mrs. Prince-Mills, the widow. I was busy in the garden over some cabbages that had a touch of frost bite, when she popped her head over the hedge suddenly, and said: "Bring Phoebe in to tea this afternoon. I want you both to meet some interesting people who are coming down from London. They know all about the theatre and films and everything"

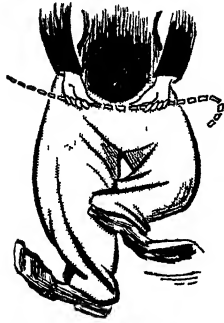
I was just going to stammer some lame excuse, but I looked up and found it very difficult. The widow appeared rather entrancing in the keen autumnal air. Her large brown eyes (which always remind me of Jessie Matthews) smiled invitingly; and she was dressed in a straight boxy tweed coat, in the brightest blue-green mixture, which suited her fresh complexion. "Thank you very much," I said weakly, "we'll be delighted."

But later, when I broke the news, Phoebe seemed astonished. "Fancy coaxing you of all people, to a tea-party," she cried. "That woman wants something, George. She is always wanting something, she"

AFTER MANY YEARS

"That's right, she wants us to meet some visitors. They're film experts . . . interesting, probably."

Phoebe snorted dubiously, but later, when we got to the party she seemed quite pleased. The visitors turned out to be a theatrical producer called Groves, and his wife, who had been an actress, and what they didn't know about both the stage and films amounted to nothing at all. But one factor they just didn't comprehend was the public.



Why, demanded Mr. Groves, does the "star system" always succeed in films, even if the story is a poor one, whereas in the theatre the greatest "star" in the universe cannot save a poor play? "Look at Diana Wynyard," he exclaimed, "the biggest draw of any living English actress. Yet her play, 'Ante-Room,' ran for only a week. And Mary Ellis, an actress of international reputation and achievement! Her play, 'Farewell Performance,' was a flop." And then he went on to maintain that had these two great "stars" been making films instead of acting in plays their "fans" would have supported them through thick and thin, no matter what the production was like.

Of course I didn't agree. I instanced films

upon which even Garbo, Joan Crawford, Myrna Loy, or Ronald Colman looked back with horror. And so we talked and argued, without reaching any definite conclusion (tea party conversation seldom does), until Phoebe said: "The only film star in the world who hasn't had a flop is Charlie Chaplin."

"Have you seen him in *Modern Times*?" enquired our hostess.

"Yes, I have, but George hasn't. He's going to see it in Manchester to-morrow."

The widow clapped her hands. "Do ask him to take me," she exclaimed. "I haven't seen Charlie Chaplin for years."

"I'm sure George would be delighted," murmured Phoebe, completely taken off her guard.

As a matter of fact I was delighted. All my life I have appreciated the company of charming and intelligent women, and I hope I shall continue to do so. The only kind I can't stick are the chattering creatures who persist in talking during a film so that you miss half the dialogue, but in this respect Mrs. Prince-Mills was a model of rectitude. She sat demurely watching Charlie Chaplin's antics with the machinery, and never uttered a word. And then I noticed there was a strange silence *everywhere* in the cinema, and even the laughter was subdued. We were experiencing a throw-back after many years to the days of the silent film.

AFTER MANY YEARS



WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

It took me quite a long time to get used to the old technique. The pantomime gestures, which must be performed all the time to convey dialogue. The excessive slap-stick to gain laughs where a single sentence of the spoken word will do it so much more easily. The necessity of props in the background. It was not until the gamin personality of Paulette Goddard appeared that I began to enjoy myself. What a wistful, elfin creature she is amongst those slum dockyard surroundings, and how completely she fits into Charlie's drab and dreary life as he goes from one jail to another, buffeted about through his own strange eccentricities, misunderstood by all save his faithful gamin. It was Paulette rather than Charlie who "tuned" me into this unusual picture. As she waited for her little man outside the prisons, she managed to convey such a sense of loyalty and comradeship that dialogue would only have spoiled the effect. I felt glad that she had not to talk. She imparted a strange beauty to this film, and as Charlie Chaplin fell under her spell so did we. The ending was far better than the beginning.

But as we drove home I felt glad that we have escaped from the "silent" days, and my com-



PAULETTE - GAMINE

AFTER MANY YEARS

panion thought so, too. We agreed that the captions, "Once more they are homeless—alone," or "Came the dawn," or "Friendless again—in a cruel world" were things that one had grown out of, and that even the rowdiest of the "talkies" required more skill and ingenuity. We decided that *Modern Times* lacked continuity, in spite of the four years which were spent in its making. We felt certain that the cinema was progressing in our time towards something greater than it had ever been before, that its future was unlimited, its potentialities immense, its influence assured.

I felt quite exalted when I dropped the widow at her home, and joined Phoebe, who was having a cup of tea by the fire when I returned. "Well, how did you enjoy it?" she asked.

"Very much, but we both decided we had grown out of 'silent' pictures."

"Men never grow out of anything except their hats," said Phoebe, handing me a cup of tea.

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT

IT seems that there is a perfectly simple way of gaining admission to a picture-house without buying a ticket. "Babe," the manager of our Grand Cinema, told me about it and I was horror-stricken. A man had approached him at the door, and told him he had left a pair of gloves there the day before—buff-coloured gloves; and did he know anything about them? The "Babe" didn't know a thing, but he escorted the man inside and past the box-office, where he showed him how to reach the cloak-room in the downstairs lounge. When the stranger got there he looked at all the gloves that had been collected (mostly only one hand, dropped by women at emotional moments), and after that he went upstairs and saw the programme without paying. The "Babe" said that once this kind of thing started there was no knowing where it would end. In his cloak-room he had a bowler hat, several dozens of assorted handkerchiefs, a lady's handbag (with the butt-end of a piece of lipstick inside), sixteen odd gloves, a boy scout's hunting knife, a leather cigarette case, and 24 different varieties of powder puffs. Some of these had been there for years, because nobody had taken any interest in them, but now the "Babe" seemed to think people would come

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT

pretending to claim things and dissipating his profits by slipping in to the cinema free.

"Set a trap," I suggested. "Get Winnie (the



girl who handles the perfume squirt) to watch for a culprit. Then send for me and pretend I'm a policeman." After which sage counsel I walked majestically up the stairs to see *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. For some reason I had

missed this startling technicoloured picture, though it had been about the country for quite a while enjoying an exceptional popularity with our farmer folk, who love stories about the land above everything.

This one just reeks of the earth, of old feuds between pioneer families, of the farmers' fears that railroads will be an enemy of the plough, of independent individualism battling with the march of progress, of backwoods bigotry not so long dead in England as we sometimes imagine. It goes right down to the fundamentals where a tooth is a tooth and an eye is an eye, and the farmer is lucky who doesn't lose one or the other in some feud of trespass or primitive right.

The two families at enmity in the Lonesome Pine country are the Tollivers and the Falins, represented in the film by Henry Fonda with his

cousin and fiancée, Sylvia Sidney ; and Robert Barrat as Buck Falin. For generations there has been killing and jealousy between these two tribes, so when Fred MacMurray and Nigel Bruce arrive to push through a railroad scheme which will include the lands of both families, the situation between them is aggravated rather than improved.

As usual, however, Fred MacMurray's personality dominates the scene. He saves Henry Fonda's life, which helps towards getting the Tolliver family to sign—and the Falin family soon follows suit, fearing it might be missing something. After which fine strategy, Fred gets busy on his railroad pioneering job, endearing himself meanwhile to Buddy Tolliver, who is none other than our splendid little friend, Spanky MacFarland, the hero of many an "Our Gang" comedy. A loveable child he proves himself to be in this story, and when his death occurs at the hands of a Falin, it is easy to understand how the ancient feud instantly bursts into uncontrollable flame.

But Buddy isn't the only one that has fallen for the tall, handsome railroad engineer. June Tolliver (Sylvia Sidney), though her hand is "promised" to her cousin Dave (Henry Fonda), simply cannot resist Fred MacMurray's magnetism. She is continually waylaying him in one place and another, until a very natural new feud appears between Fred and Henry. Nigel Bruce is in despair at the way things are going, and shows it in his usual bewildered, comical, droll manner.

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT



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The fisticuff fight between Fred MacMurray and Henry Fonda is no feather-bed affair. They hit each other hard, stinging, real blows. They knock each other down and bang heads about in such an exciting fashion that it is almost a relief when the fight becomes more general, and they both join forces against the Falins, who have made a raid upon the camp.

The secret of the success of this film is in its appeal to the primitive which lies buried (so I'm informed) in all of us. Not only does it depict the passions of generations between the two families, but it also shows how one girl who is loved by two strong, manly young men can play the very dickens with their emotions. Sylvia Sidney is an adept at upsetting both her lovers, and she is splendid at maintaining the suspense. She gets Fred MacMurray in the end of course, but only because Henry Fonda (whose acting is magnificent all through) has the misfortune to be killed by one of the Falins. It is a sad ending, but the only one possible.

When the picture had finished I was sitting in a reverie (as I usually do for at least five minutes after a good film), when the "Babe" touched me on the shoulder and beckoned me outside. He looked very excited. "Winnie's caught one," he whispered. "She's



THE VICAR'S WIFE
LET'S GO!

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT

locked her up in the office. You've got to come along now and scare the pants off her by pretending you're a policeman."

I must confess, when confronted with my own idea, I didn't like the job much. However, true to my word, I flung the office door open and marched inside with that heavy, flat-footed tread which policemen effect. "What's all this 'ere about?" I said gruffly.

The Vicar's wife jumped out of a chair and gave me a baleful glare. "I might have known *you* were at the back of this outrage," she cried. "I suppose you think you *own* this cinema?"

I must have looked just as big a fool as Nigel Bruce often does, for I stood there speechless, blinking at her, while she had her say—she said a mouthful!

Apparently the Vicar's wife had stepped in to the Grand to see if there were any derelict garments in the left-luggage room which would be suitable for her next jumble sale. Some time previously the "Babe" had told her to do this, and then he had forgotten all about it.

She got away with the entire stock of gloves, powder-puffs, handkerchiefs, and even the bowler hat, and I helped her to carry them home. But as she was still a little angry with me, I retained the boy scout's hunting knife in my own possession. In case of accident.

THE MAN FROM RHODESIA

WHEN Phoebe looked up from her letters the other morning, and announced that "a man from Rhodesia" was coming to stay with us for the week-end, Edward and Jane exchanged glances of sudden consternation over the breakfast table. "W'ot for?" enquired Jane, with her mouth full of toast and marmalade.

"For the annual meeting of the Marchester Welfare Society, of course," explained Phoebe, as if she had told us all about it and we hadn't been listening. "He is going to speak to us about some very important world developments, or something . . . something very interesting of that sort. Helpful of him, don't you think?"

Why a man should come all the way from Rhodesia to address the women of Marchester was a profound thought in itself, and the mystery only deepened when Jane exclaimed: "I expect he shoots tigers!"

"*Lions*, you mean," corrected Edward sarcastically. "There aren't any tigers in Africa."

"There are!"

"There aren't."

"Stop arguing," I commanded sternly. "It's obvious you don't know anything about Rhodesia, either of you (no more did I, but I kept that

THE MAN FROM RHODESIA

information to myself), "and the sooner you learn the better. You must be able to talk intelligently to guests, no matter what part of the world



they come from, so to-night I shall take you to see a film called *Rhodes of Africa*, for the benefit of your much-neglected education. It is an epic story of a great Empire-builder"

"Oh, Pop, have a heart," said Edward disconsolately, "I wanted to see *Rose Marie* this week." However, before

I could point out that entertainment value was not the only side of films to be considered, Phoebe got up from the table and patted her son sympathetically on the shoulder. "Never mind, darling," she said, in the manner of a nurse concealing some sort of pill in a spoonful of jam. "You go with Pop, and maybe there'll be a *Mickey Mouse* as well."

Actually, when we got to the cinema there wasn't a *Mickey Mouse* or a *Silly Symphony* to pander to the spoiled tastes of my exceedingly low-brow children. *Rhodes of Africa* was just starting with the vivid scenes of the diamond field in the early days when men were allowed to stake claims and dig their own plots of earth for diamonds. One of these men turns out to be Rhodes (in the person of Walter Huston), and because he is a much

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

cleverer financier than his neighbours he eventually manages to get control of all their claims. This gives him the power he has dreamed of all his life, and although he is a sick man, pronounced by the famous Doctor Jim Jameson (Basil Sidney) to have only a few months more to live, he determines to start on his great work of uniting the scattered countries of South Africa.

All this part of the story would have been dull enough, for it has little dramatic interest, and the theme has to be established by much dialogue, but for the wonderful acting of Walter Huston. He gets right inside the skin of Rhodes's personality, and soon we are living in the marvellous achievements and still more remarkable ideals of this great man who came to South Africa as a penniless emigrant, and became a mighty force in her history. The drama of the film really commences when Rhodes meets Paul Kruger (Oscar Homolka) for the first time; and the duel between these two men of destiny unfolds itself. Both the actors are well cast, and the manner in which they interpret the characters of Rhodes and Kruger transform the story into one of throbbing, vivid interest.

There are no soft love interludes introduced as a contrast to the stark reality of the narrative. At first I thought Peggy Ashcroft (as Anna Carpenter) was going to have a mild "affair" with Walter Huston; but the director was adamant and kept strictly to the truth. Rhodes was a sick man all his life, and had no time, or possibly

THE MAN FROM RHODESIA



inclination, for the softer side. He is fighting for time to get things done before he dies, and only just succeeds. "Fancy," he gasps, as he is gripped at last by the dread lung disease that has been pursuing him all his life, "fancy having the huge country named after-you, yet not being able to get a breath of air. Open the windows . . . wide, wider."

Nobody can beat Walter Huston when it comes to a death scene, and his Death of Rhodes will probably go down in film history as a classic.

Edward and Jane were very silent as we walked home, and I perceived the film had made a great impression on their young minds. They went to bed early that night, and I did not see very much of them for the rest of the week, as I was away from home on business quite a lot. But we all met again on Saturday at lunch, to greet Phoebe's guest from Rhodesia.

He was an unexpectedly mild-looking little man, with a walrus moustache and a kind of old-fashioned choker collar, which you don't often see people wearing nowadays. But the children and Phoebe were determined not to be put off by appearances, even though he refused a glass of sherry and seemed to prefer water to beer.

"Did you ever play marbles with diamonds, Mr. Simms?" enquired Jane, determined to get in on the ground floor.

Our guest was rather startled. "They were made of glass or some inferior substance, in my young days," he confessed.

THE MAN FROM RHODESIA

"I expect you were in the Jameson Raid?" said Edward, coming to the point as one man to another.

Mr. Simms looked quite horrified. "I strongly disapproved of Doctor Jameson and all his works," he answered with considerable feeling.

Phoebe hurried to the rescue. "You see, Mr. Simms," she explained, "the children have been seeing a film about Mr. Rhodes . . . er - Mr. Rhodes of Rhodesia, you know . . . so elevating and educational"

"I rarely frequent the films," grunted Mr. Simms.

After that we left him alone and talked about other things, until Phoebe took our guest off to Marchester to his meeting. We were just sitting down to tea when she returned without him, looking simply radiant after the strain. "He's gone," she said thankfully. "He had to go back by an early train."

"I expect he's gone to shoot tigers in Rhodesia," growled Edward, who was still sore about the Jameson Raid.

"Oh, my dears, we were quite wrong, he doesn't come from Rhodesia at all," exclaimed Phoebe. "I must have got it wrong somehow. He's a teacher of Economics or something from Roodean. That isn't a country, you know—it's a university!"

We consumed our tea in silence after this pronouncement, until a bright thought struck Edward. "Well, we've all learned a lot about Africa," he announced. "Maybe I'll go there some day."

"Take your gun with you, Honey," said Jane.

WALLS OF JERICHO

“ A TROPICAL disturbance centred over the English Channel and moving slowly northwards,” was how the newspapers described it next day. What we said about it at the time may be left to the imagination.

I had driven Phoebe to London in the car, because the *Sales* were on; and I had picked her up, bruised but triumphant, with parcels of “bargains” about 6 o’clock for the homeward journey. It was a stuffy evening, and about 20 miles from Hyde Park Corner the storm hit us!

Perhaps you can remember the cloudburst in *It Happened One Night*, when Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert were getting matey in the motor bus? Well, our storm was similar, except that we weren’t in a bus. We were in a small car with a leaky hood and open at the sides, and we had to huddle like a couple of boy scouts in a bivouack while the rain emptied itself out of the heavens in a waterspout.

Phoebe’s hat (a new one that day—5/11 $\frac{3}{4}$) whipped off in the wind and disappeared from view. The trees on the sides of the road bent nearly double against the gale. The water, rebounding from the road, soaked our legs and sprayed over us. It was difficult to hear anything

WALLS OF JERICHO

above the roar, except tremendous blasts of thunder. We couldn't drive through it because the road soon became a torrent, and swirled right



IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

over our back axle. We couldn't do anything, in fact, except sit there with the rain coming at us from every direction.

Fortunately it soon passed. Cloudbursts are so fierce; they are usually short-lived. The sun actually came out in a damp sort of way as the clouds rolled on.

"Are you all right?" I enquired anxiously of Phoebe, whose thin cotton frock was hanging about her in wisps, while her hair clung to her face like a bunch of seaweed.

"Absolutely O.K., buddy," she answered, rising to the emergency as she always does.

But the car wasn't O.K. It wouldn't move, the engine was as dead as mutton. There

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

was nothing for it but to walk for help, and we were both shivering with cold.

We paddled along, trying to pretend it was great fun, until we reached a small market town where the landlady of an old-fashioned inn called "The Rose," after a sharp glance at Phoebe's wedding ring, took us in and gave us a room. She dried our clothes while we sat in towels, and then she sent a farm-cart to tow in the car. It was too late to get home, so we decided to spend the night there.

After we had eaten an enormous meal of boiled mutton and turnips, with bread-and-butter pudding to follow, we both began to feel that the world wasn't such a bad place after all. Phoebe announced that it was too early for bed—we must go to the pictures because the landlady had told her it was a very good programme.

What a blessing the cinema is in a country town! A few years back we would have had to sit in the coffee-room of this inn, with nothing to do but turn over the pages of old magazines. Now we were able to get two seats in a tiny little building shaped like a tunnel with a small screen at the far end, and see a film we had missed in our own neighbourhood—*The Suicide Club*.

Phoebe was so pleased she nearly wept, and for my part I was in no mood to be critical. Which, as events proved, was just as well because Robert Montgomery doesn't look his best in fancy dress; while my gay favourite, Rosalind Russell, is made to act in such a wooden manner that she might

WALLS OF JERICHO



WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

have been a waxwork in Madame Tussaud's. One of the favourite stories of childhood suffered accordingly.

What a story it could be if well directed ! Robert Montgomery is a princeling, commanded by his father to marry the unwilling daughter of a neighbouring monarch. She seems a spirited girl until we see Rosalind Russell in the part, and find that some kind of order must have gone forth that she must not smile, and that princesses hold themselves like ramrods on all occasions. Perhaps it is the atmosphere of the Suicide Club which was overpowering, for the scene, when the members are sitting round a large table and drawing cards to decide their fate, is a gruesome enough one. Fate (or rather Reginald Owen as the President of the Club) decides that Robert Montgomery is the one to die, and that his death should be at the hands of Rosalind Russell ; but even when the girl finds she can't get on with the job, she is only allowed to soften for a moment in Robert's strong arms. It is a harshly-photographed, unconvincing film, in which all the players are so tightly corseted that something might burst if they were to move suddenly, and both Phoebe and I felt sorry for them.

But we were by no means sorry for ourselves as we made our way back to the inn, for we were in holiday mood.

The landlady was bustling about and said she hoped we had enjoyed the picture, and didn't

WALLS OF JERICHO

Rosalind Russell make a lovely princess? She said they'd had Jack Buchanan last week, but her favourites were Laurel and Hardy and Donald Duck. She said she didn't like the idea of Donna Duck being introduced, because Donald wasn't the sort that wanted females around. He ought to be a gay, unattached bachelor roaming around with his flute under his wing, always getting himself into trouble. . . . She said our car was under cover, and a mechanic would fix it first thing in the morning.

"Just like a film story," I remarked, sitting on the edge of my twin bed and gazing round the room.

Phoebe wasn't listening. She was staring sorrow-



fully at a pile of parcels, soaked and bedraggled, which had been brought up from the car, her "bargains" from the sales.

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Inspiration came to me in a flash. I took all the strings off the parcels and tied them together. I fastened a line between the two beds and then hung all the contents of the parcels up to dry according to the best Clark Gable tradition. Phoebe giggled approvingly, but she was so tired she was asleep before I had finished.

When the landlady came in with the tea in the morning, she looked surprised, until Phoebe explained that it was "Walls of Jericho," and didn't she remember Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable in *It Happened One Night*?

The landlady remembered very well. She'd liked that film, she said, and Clark Gable was one of her favourites; always up to something he was. Then as the story came back to her, her face froze and she addressed me sternly from the door. She said, "I wouldn't have took you in if I'd known you wasn't married. This ain't 'Ollywood."

We laughed so heartily the "Walls of Jericho" fell down of their own accord.

THE BLONDE IN THE BOX

SINCE Edward James and his girl-friend, Prunella Morgan, arrived for the Christmas holidays, things have been distinctly lively in the home. Prunella works in a film studio near London, and when she comes to stay with us she usually brings a stock of entertaining stories. For instance, she was invited to a formal dinner party the other evening, at which a full half-dozen of the most distinguished ladies of the screen were present. Prunella said the meal hadn't progressed very far when one of the stars was handed a telegram. She read it and was visibly touched. "Isn't that sweet!" she exclaimed. "Now isn't that sweet!"

The wire was passed round the table. It read, "We know you will be the most beautiful woman there to-night," and was signed "Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck."

We all laughed very heartily at this, but stories just tumble out of Prunella. Like all Americans she loves them dearly, and when she isn't telling stories, she's singing, or ringing up people quite unnecessarily, or playing the radio—with bouts of all-in wrestling with Edward in the intervals, just to keep herself in tip-top physical condition.

One afternoon, when they had knocked over a

revolving bookcase in the sitting-room and scattered the books all over the floor, I grabbed my hat and went out.



Phoebe ran after me into the garden. "You're not angry with those children, George?" she enquired anxiously.

"Not in the least," I answered truthfully, "but I want a little peace. I'm going to Marchester to buy a Christmas present for Aunt Adelaide. What size in gloves does she take?"

"Don't buy gloves, buy her some records," urged Phoebe. "She's got a Gigli complex at the moment; he's an opera singer who has been singing on the screen. She's just crazy about him."

The girl in the gramophone shop knew all about Gigli, and selected a record for me to hear. She

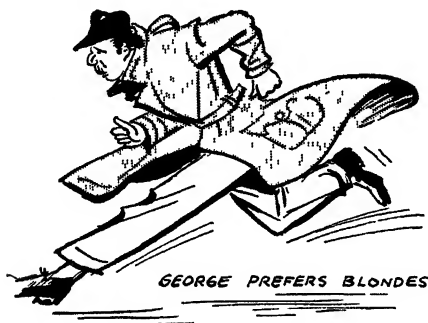
THE BLONDE IN THE BOX

was a smart-looking blonde, with an impudent smile, and dressed very suitably in a black frock with bell sleeves and a pink flower at the V neckline. She was obviously a good saleswoman, for she took me into a small room like a telephone-box, with a glass-panelled door, and slipped a record on the radiogram. Soon the rafters were ringing with the "Swan Song" from *Lohengrin*, and the girl disappeared about her business.

Presently she returned when the record had been played. "Like it?" she enquired anxiously.

"Not personally," I explained. "Too high-brow for me. Doesn't Gigli sing anything else?"

"Oh yes, he's wonderful!" said the girl with enthusiasm. "I saw him in a film called *Forget Me Not*. Seen it?"



I shook my head.

The girl drew up a chair and sat down beside me in the box. "Oh, but you ought to have seen

it," she exclaimed, in the earnest manner of a confirmed film fan. "It was here last week, what a pity you missed it. Joan Gardner was the girl, and two men were in love with her: a sailor and an opera singer—don't ask me why. Anyway, she married the opera singer (*Gigli*), out of pity, because of his motherless little boy (*Richard Gofe*). Cutest kid I've seen on the screen next to Shirley Temple, prattles away so natural, you wouldn't think he was acting at all. Joan Gardner travels all round the world with *Gigli*, see? And she's just kind of settling down to married life when her sailor boy turns up again. Ivan Brandt, he is very young and handsome, and he tries to persuade her to run away to Australia with him " She paused for breath and then resumed before I could get a word in edgeways

"But she doesn't go, see? She changes her mind before it was too late. She comes stealing home to find *Gigli* singing his little boy to sleep with his voice full of sobs and tears running down his face. The other side?"

"Why weren't they running down both sides?" I enquired.

The girl suddenly burst into squeals of laughter. "I meant will I put on the other side of the record," she giggled, at which I perceived I had made a joke, and we both laughed heartily for some time, until I happened to look through the glass window to find myself being regarded with astonishment and delight by Edward James and Prunella.

THE BLONDE IN THE BOX



WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

“Naughty Pop!” said Prunella sternly, as I stumbled out of the box feeling something of a fool. “Phoebe said we would find you here, but”

Edward James was much more understanding. “You always were a good judge, Pop,” he said, gazing admiringly after the flying ankles of my little blonde record-seller.

The children had followed me in the hope that I would take them to the pictures, and of course, under the circumstances I had no other choice. The film we saw was *Rose Marie*, and as Edward and Prunella are both crazy about music they were soon entranced. So was I, indeed, for this old story has been very beautifully re-told, and in the setting of real mountains and pine forests gives the atmosphere of the Rocky Mountains in a manner which could not be attempted on the stage. Jeanette Macdonald is an opera star who goes in search of her brother (James Stewart); and Nelson Eddy is the Sergeant in the “Mounties” who has the brother in charge. The theme is the well-known tug or contest between love and duty, for the Sergeant falls in love with his prisoner’s sister, and is sorely tempted to avoid his duty as a policeman.

Nelson Eddy and Jeanette Macdonald are both very well cast, and sing all the familiar songs very joyously and tunefully. James Stewart, too, shows his mettle as an actor, and it is not surprising he has since been chosen for longer parts. And the

THE BLONDE IN THE BOX

totem dance of the Indians is a thing to marvel at, so excellently has it been produced. There seem to be thousands and thousands of real Indians performing for our special benefit.

It was a very suitable film to see in a holiday season, and we all returned home in excellent spirits. Prunella thanked me prettily for my hospitality, but she said she'd never rest until I told her the story that had made the blonde in the box laugh so much.

Fancy *me* telling stories to a gramophone girl !

It just goes to show how deceptive appearances may be. Especially when I forgot to buy any records for Aunt Adelaide, and had to return post-haste to Marchester to get them before closing time.

PHOEBE TOUCHES WOOD

PHOEBE startled me the other morning by stating she was getting very bored. "There's a time in every woman's life when she needs a good thrill," she sighed, "and I don't seem to have had one in years. One day is exactly the same as another—dusting, housekeeping, cooking, nothing of an exciting nature ever seems to happen. . . ."

I was about to remark "Touch wood," when a loud crash in the kitchen caused us to jump to our feet. We rushed outside, just in time to see a large Persian cat called "Wonky," the adored pet of the widow next door, disappearing through the window with a herring in his mouth. On the floor, surrounded by broken plates, lay two more herrings with their heads bitten off.

"Lumme, Mum, whatever's 'appened?" enquired Sally, our "tweeny," emerging open-mouthed from the pantry. "I never 'eard such a noise!"

"That cat again!" exclaimed Phoebe furiously. "He's always around when we have fish in the house. He's a thief! I shall ring up the police and have him destroyed."

After which outburst I went off to the office, well knowing that the last person in the world to

do an animal an injury would be Phoebe, and that the cat would be back again the next time we had fish. I was surprised, therefore, when I got home for Saturday lunch, to find Mrs. Prince-Mills, the widow, in earnest conversation with Phoebe. They were both looking rather scared.

"Listen, George," said Phoebe, shutting the door of our sitting-room carefully. "What do you make of this? Mrs. Prince-Mills has been getting threatening letters; her life is in danger!"

Two bits of paper were handed to me. On one was scrawled, "Watch out for MURDER," and on the other, "WARNING—your deer one's in great DANGER!"

"That must mean my Willie," cried Mrs. Prince-Mills, trembling. "Oh dear, oh dear, what am I to do? He may get kidnapped by gangsters."

I laughed very heartily at such an idea, and gave both ladies a glass of sherry to calm their nerves. "Things like that simply don't happen in England," I said reassuringly. "It's someone playing a joke. Forget it . . ."

But our neighbour refused to be comforted, until Phoebe offered to take her and Little Willie for a drive in the afternoon. They went off soon after lunch, and, feeling rather lonely on my one free afternoon of the week, I strolled out to the pictures for some recreation.

The first film on the programme was a rollicking affair called *Miss Pacific Fleet*, in which Joan Blondell

and Glenda Farrell were immensely entertaining. As a couple of hard-boiled chorus girls, they get mixed up with the Navy and Marines over a game of skill they are running in a seaside amusement booth. Allen Jenkins, a U.S.A. sailor, keeps on winning all the prizes until the girls are bankrupt. But later he repents, and comes to the rescue with the suggestion that Joan shall stand for the beauty competition, but unfortunately things go wrong. Joan has fallen in love with a handsome Marine (Warren Hull), and Allen Jenkins is so incensed by her desertion that when he wins the boxing match he gives all the votes to his former "honey"—Marie Wilson.

Marie is the dumbest thing ever seen on the screen, but what a discovery! Her nitwit wisecracks, crazy chuckles and idiotic gestures are the work of a very clever little actress. She fits into this mad film almost as perfectly as Hugh Herbert, who, as the alcoholic organiser of the beauty contest, is very funny, indeed. There wasn't a dull moment for those who, like myself, enjoy American humour.

The programme was well-balanced, for the next picture, a thriller, gave my aching sides a rest. *The Preview Murder Mystery* is about a film actor (Rod La Rocque), whose life is mysteriously threatened at the height of his career. One of his films has just been completed, but he gets repeated warnings that if he attends the preview he will be murdered. Yet, in spite of police protection, the

PHOEBE TOUCHES WOOD



QIA

HUGH
HERBERT

murder duly takes place in the middle of the cinema with hundreds of people looking on. After that the mystery deepens as Thomas Jackson and Reginald Denny try to solve it. All the employees are kept in the studios while the investigations are proceeding, and they become so nervy that all sorts of surprising things happen.

Reginald Denny is very impressive as an amateur detective. He is in love with his beautiful secretary (Frances Drake), and we get some romantic glimpses of these two which prove that Frances is a very pretty and engaging little person, whom no bachelor employer could possibly fail to love unless there was something lacking in his make-up.

But, as in all thrillers, the romantic side must be cut to the minimum. The excitement boils up to a grand climax where the murderer is discovered and chased along the roof tops. As usual with me, he turned out to be someone I had not suspected, but then I'm very bad at clues and have never yet seen a murder mystery without making up my mind that the wrong person had committed the crime.

I walked home, brooding over this deficiency in my personality. I tried to link up the threatening letters which Rod La Rocque received on scraps of paper in the early part of the film, with the climax and the ending. And then the thought suddenly occurred to me that whoever had sent those scraps of paper to Mrs. Prince-Mills must have seen *The Preview Murder Mystery*, and got the idea from the film.

Probably all thought of the matter would have ended there had I not gone through the garden gate when I reached home, instead of the front door. Sally was sitting at the kitchen table sucking a stump of pencil, and when she saw me she jumped up as if she had been shot, and hid a piece of paper behind her back. The solution of our private mystery came to me in a flash. I said: "You're a naughty girl, Sally, to frighten people that way. If you don't stop it I won't let you go to the pictures any more."

Such a dreadful thought broke Sally up completely. "I only done it to frighten the cat away," she moaned. "You won't get me into trouble, sir, I 'opes."

Of course I promised I wouldn't.

When the ladies returned I said that the scraps of paper Mrs. Prince-Mills had received were merely a publicity stunt. I said I had just seen a marvellous thriller at the Grand, the most exciting picture in a long while. . . .

"Thriller?" cried Mrs. Prince-Mills. "I must go and see it. Every now and then I need a good thrill."

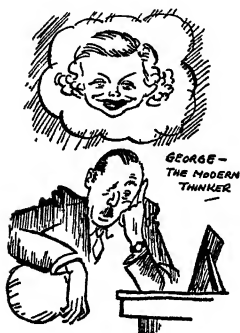
Phoebe touched the table quickly. She told me afterwards that as far as she was concerned, what with the sensation caused by the widow in a tea shop in Marchester when she lit up a cheroot, and Little Willie being sick on the floor through eating too many cream buns, she'd had thrills enough for one day.

AN INFLUENCE FOR GOOD

THE only thing I dislike about dogs is their insistency upon walking. When I got home last Saturday, tired after a hard week's work, and anxious only for a quiet hour or two with the papers and the radio, Sandy our Sealyham started tugging at the legs of my trousers. I took no notice of this invitation until Katherine Hepburn, the spotted Dalmatian, shoved her velvet muzzle on my lap and gazed at me with a soulful expression in her beautiful eyes. As this gesture had no effect, both dogs suddenly sprang upon my knees and scattered the papers all over the room, until they got me on my feet. "If you want to go for a walk, I don't," I exclaimed crossly. Then I saw the wagging tails and relented. "Well, if you'll behave yourselves" I took down the leather leads, and they both started barking about their own cleverness in the silly way dogs have.

As usual they did not behave themselves for long. About two miles from the house I let them loose in a narrow lane, but a man riding a bicycle came round a bend so quickly that, to avoid Sandy in the middle of his path, he applied his brakes and fell off with a crash. Sandy yelped, and Katherine—thinking someone was hurting her

little pal, sprang at the man and started to worry him. When I pulled her off, imagine my surprise at finding the victim was our Vicar !



You might have thought that getting worried by a large Dalmatian was an everyday occurrence with the Vicar, for he jumped to his feet, smiling broadly. "Why, you're the very man I wanted to see, George," he said, while I was picking up his bike and trying to dust the dirt off his clothes. "Have

you seen Ginger Rogers in *Follow the Fleet* ? "

I said I had not, but I intended to do so as soon as possible.

"Don't lose a moment," said the Vicar earnestly. "You *must* see her. I'm going to preach about her on Sunday. She is the most wholesome little person in the world. That picture is an influence for good. I felt elevated, uplifted, after seeing it. It's as clean as a whistle ; there isn't a nasty hint or suggestion from beginning to end. If there were more films like that we parsons would have nothing to do."

"Fred Astaire is a marvellous chap," I remarked, remembering his delightful dancing in other films. But the Vicar had mounted his bike again and didn't seem interested in Fred. "Ginger

Rogers will do you good," he shouted over his shoulder as he pedalled away.

I looked after the retreating figure, then I looked at the dogs. They were both feeling utterly ashamed of themselves. "She'll do me more good than walking a pair of scalliwags like you," I snapped, turning for home. "You're for your kennels, and serve you damwell right—and me for the pictures."

As usual the Vicar was right, for he is a very good film critic. *Follow the Fleet* was sheer joy to me, and Ginger Rogers provided more than half of the entertainment. She is an amazing little person! She hasn't got any of that snaky, husky glamour that is supposed to be such an attraction to men; she hasn't got beauty, in the accepted sense; she never shoves herself into the limelight—yet, a single smile from her seems to fill the cinema with sunshine. There was one scene, a mock rehearsal with Fred for their improvised show, when she made my heart stand still. I could watch this a hundred times. Fred and Ginger act and dance as they have never done before. They make mistakes purposely, that only accentuate the marvel of their technique. They clown in a manner that the greatest comedians would find it difficult to equal. And Ginger looked so sweet and *alive* the whole time, that my enthusiasm knew no bounds.

Some people assert that the story doesn't matter much in a musical play, but I don't agree. *Follow*

AN INFLUENCE FOR GOOD



the Fleet has a very good story. Fred and Ginger have been partners in a song-and-dance act, but their partnership split because Fred got sentimental and wanted to marry Ginger. She told him the old, old story—that her career mattered more than marriage, so Fred joined the Navy “to see the sea.” He saw the Pacific and the Atlantic, and many other seas before he met Ginger again, and although the battleship part of the film is very entertaining, it seems merely a prelude. Fred by himself is superb. Ginger by herself is magnificent. But when they are both together—words just fail me to describe their perfection.

Fortunately they are together quite a lot. They meet when Fred’s battleship is in San Francisco. Fred finds his late partner working in a sailors’ dance hall (which was as far as she had got with her “career” in his absence), and their reunion is a joyous affair. They both discover that “all their eggs are in one basket,” and after many disappointing interludes in which a wonderful monkey-actor plays a considerable part, they find happiness ever after. I felt it was the least they deserved, and wished it for them inwardly, if only for the pleasure they had given to me.

There are others in the picture, of course, and one is apt to forget the magnificent team-work that must go into the making of a picture such as this. Harriet Hilliard is a newcomer to the screen, but by no means a novice at “torch” singing, a kind of throaty crooning with a throb

in it, which suits tunes like "Get Thee Behind Me, Satan." Randolph Scott plays the part of the sailor who has a girl in every port, or even two sometimes. I felt a certain sympathy for Harriet Hilliard, because even after she marries him she is bound to remain one of the many. Randolph certainly has a "way" with the girls that is irresistible, as Astrid Allwyn discovered also. She simply couldn't help herself.

But shining like a planet amongst all this talent of stars is Ginger Rogers. I walked home marvelling about Ginger. I was in the exalted mood the Vicar had talked about. I sat down in my armchair to think deeply about her, to be alone with her in my thoughts.

A large dog and a small dog jumped up on my lap. They licked my face and said they were sorry for being naughty. They vowed with their tails that they'd never be naughty again, and—please, please would master take them out for just a teeny, weeny walk?

In spite of all I had suffered, I took down the leather leads again. Our Vicar is quite right—Ginger Rogers is an influence for good.

WE LAUGHED AND LAUGHED AND LAUGHED

OUR home is one of those which is either quiet and restful (*i.e.*, when the children are away), or uproariously noisy (*i.e.*, when the children are at home). And the two states are so different, that when one of them lasts too long we always look forward to the other as a contrast.

As Edward brought his girl-friend Prunella down to stay for a few days, the noisy state has been in the ascendant lately. Ostensibly Prunella is here to rest after strenuous work in her film studio, but unless you happened to know that she was resting, you would never guess it. Her idea of relaxation is to dash about all the time getting her hair waved, or ringing up someone on the telephone, or sending off telegrams. She's never idle for a second, and usually she's talking all the time in the American manner. Every meal has been a scream since she arrived, for she has a quick sense of humour and enjoys wisecracking. Her "Little Audrey" stories—many of which I am convinced she invents herself—have been causing us apoplexy.

"Little Audrey went in swimming and hit her head on a big ship. But when she came to she

laughed and she laughed and she laughed, because she knew it was not the last hardship she would encounter in life."

This should be related in the Gracie Allen



—BUT LITTLE AUDREY LAUGHED AND LAUGHED BECAUSE ETHEL'S EYES WERE SHUT

manner, with a kind of hysterical giggle at the "she laughed" bit. Very silly and childish, no doubt, but immensely entertaining. Here is another. —

"Little Audrey's mother sent her out to buy flypaper. But little Audrey laughed and she laughed and she laughed because she knew flies didn't use paper."

Laughter is infectious, I suppose, for one evening after a spate of "Little Audrey" at supper, I felt moved to suggest a visit to Marchester, where Eddie Cantor was performing in *Strike Me Pink*. This was greeted with unanimous approval, and when we got to the cinema, we laughed almost without stopping for the entire length of the film. Everybody in the audience was laughing, except a plump woman sitting near me who made squealing noises instead. When Harry Parke, hanging from the basket of a balloon in mid-air, found it difficult to restrain his pants from falling down, I thought the poor soul was going to have a heart attack. She sat huddled in her chair, wiping her eyes and emitting hysterical

chuckles, until Eddie Cantor appeared on the screen in his combinations, and then she started squealing again. So between the audience and the screen, we had a marvellous evening.

Yet, I suppose if *Strike Me Pink* were carefully dissected, there wouldn't be a great deal to it. The story opens with Eddie Cantor in the rôle of a timid little tailor's assistant, suffering from an inferiority complex which he tries to cure by buying a book called "Are you a Mouse or a Man?" The book is accompanied by a gramophone record which Eddie puts on his gramophone, and it starts ordering him about and telling him what to do. Eddie's reaction to this is really very, very funny; and he learns a number of gestures and attitudes which will assure him of success in life. He casts away his mouse-like habits, obtains a job as manager of an amusement park, and begins to impress the world of his ability as an administrator.

Sally Eilers is his private secretary and a very pretty and efficient one she proves herself to be. For gangsters have descended upon poor Eddie—gangsters of the "tough" character so familiar in the shape of William Frawley, Brian Donlevy and Jack La Rue. They desire to instal crook gambling machines in the amusement park, and rob the public of its money. They point out that previous managers who have refused their wishes have met mysterious deaths. They try to scare Eddie into subjection.

WE LAUGHED AND LAUGHED



But with the delightful and clever aid of Sally, Eddie is able to withstand them for a time, until he gains the reputation of being invincible. But his one weakness is that he can't see the wood for the trees, and all the time his wonderful little secretary is falling in love with him, he imagines himself to be passionately in love with Ethel Merman, who entrances him with her singing at a cabaret. It wasn't the sort of singing that would make me sentimental, but every man to his taste. It is the weak point in Eddie's armour, and eventually the gangsters catch him through his devotion to Ethel. He sees her in her dressing-room, where a "frame-up" is staged, in which Eddie agrees to take the crook fruit-machines to save Ethel from being charged with murder.

After that it is the wildest and most improbable story, but what action! The gangsters chase Eddie all over the amusement park, up and down the scenic railway, round the big wheel, through crowds of people in one of those tiny motor-cars that children love so much—even up in a captive balloon in company with his old friend and protector, Harry Parke. Setting aside the trick photography, which is very clever, Eddie Cantor is no mean acrobat. He shows us what he can do on a flying trapeeze amongst other quaint accomplish-



ments, and when he is suspended in mid-air, hanging on to the basket of the balloon, we get the wildest thrills of danger and space.

Every now and then the famous Goldwyn Girls perform, but in this film they seem to count less than usual ; we are so engrossed in what the chief star will be up to next. And everything he does is funny, right up to the last line when Sally Eilers, clasped at last in Eddie's manly arms, puts up her pretty face and says, " Gee, Eddie ! Where did you learn to kiss like that ? " Those innocent, expressive big eyes of Eddie's roll round for a minute thoughtfully. " I played the bugle in the Boy Scouts," he answers, by way of explanation.

After that we went home with that rib-sore feeling which induces quiet after much laughter. But the quiet didn't last long with Prunella. Over her cocoa and biscuits she said, " I've just remembered another ' Little Audrey ' story." But the family had laughed and laughed and laughed enough for one day. We carried her up to bed and stuffed a pillow in her mouth.

GEORGE KEEPS THE CHANGE

ONE evening when we were enjoying the unusual experience of being alone after weeks of youthful society, Phoebe looked up from her knitting and said: "If you had ten pounds, what would you do with it, George?"

Without the smallest hesitation I answered, "Buy myself some clothes! I want a new suit, I want a winter overcoat, I want vests, shirts, collars, ties"

Phoebe sighed. "I know you do, you poor thing," she admitted. "You haven't had a penny to spend on yourself for months because the children are at such an expensive age. But, what I mean is—supposing you had a ten-pound note you didn't know what to do with. Just cash in your pocket, and no responsibilities to worry about"

I didn't know. Such a phenomenon hadn't occurred for so long in my private life, that I couldn't think of anything to do with it, so Phoebe went on talking in her dreamy, far-away fashion.

"I'll tell you what I would do," she said. "I'd take you up to London, and we would go to a bright musical comedy with Leslie Henson to make us laugh, and then we'd have supper at the Savoy or somewhere that we could dance to a good band ;

GEORGE KEEPS THE CHANGE



and then we would watch a cabaret show, and then”

“By that time your ten pounds would have been exhausted, and we’d have to walk home,” I explained unsympathetically. “But it’s a good idea all the same—let’s do it!”

“Huh—what will we use for money?”

“Four shillings will meet the case,” I said. “We’ll go to Marchester and see Ambrose and his band in *Soft Lights and Sweet Music*. It has a marvellous West-end caste, with Evelyn Dall, the Western Brothers, Billy Bennett and all the Hollywood Beauties from the Dorchester Hotel. We can have just as much fun as if we were in London ourselves—more perhaps, because we won’t have to tip a lot of expensive waiters.”

Phoebe looked a bit doubtful, but she went upstairs to powder her nose while I got the car out. “A man’s riches are not in the greatness of his possessions, but in the fewness of his wants,” I misquoted to myself contentedly.

We got our money’s worth when we arrived, for the first film on the programme was one made by Connie Bennett’s husband (the Marquis de la Falaise) when he went on a trip to Indo-China to do some film-shooting in the jungle. The result was produced in colour, and in many ways it is quite unique. Native Mois, a handsome tribe physically, provided the acting and kept together a primitive story of a man-eating tiger who is causing terror in the countryside. They performed

their parts naturally, with a complete lack of self-consciousness about their somewhat scanty raiment (the censor must be more of an artist than we imagined), and the colour photography gives the flesh tints a wonderful atmosphere of reality.

We saw a magnificent tiger in his natural surroundings so close to the camera sometimes that the operator must have been an exceptionally brave man to carry on with his business. And there were pythons, crocodiles, and other jungle inhabitants "shot" with the eye of an artist and the skill of a scientist. The film might best be described as an educational thriller.



WHAT PHOEBE DIDN'T LIKE

Then came *Soft Lights and Sweet Music*, with the renowned Ambrose at the head of his band of merry boys. He introduced us to a long and varied programme. The Western Brothers and Harry Tate start the ball rolling, and the continuity of the action is maintained by the ingenious device of a make-believe television apparatus which allows us to see and hear what is happening in various places at the same time.

The turn I liked best was Evelyn Dall. I had heard her on the radio, of course, but she's a girl you have to see as well as hear if you want a real kick out of it. She sings with her body, and her

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

vivacity is amazing. In the song, "I'm All In," every muscle of her body *looked* "all in" long before it was over. (Gee—what a he-man her boy-friend must have been!) And then she gave us "Lost My Rhythm," in which facial expressions, head-tossings, and more body-wriggles were the main features. A glamorous girl is Evelyn, and likely to get lots of work in the film studios, judging by the rapturous applause which broke out in the audience.

But there were some excellent turns in addition. So many of them, in fact, that we felt almost dazed. Billy Bennett gave a screamingly funny recitation on the lines of Dangerous Dan McGree, and parodied in an original manner. Elizabeth Welch sang some of her famous numbers. The Five Charladies did an amusing turn. The Three



Rhythm Brothers crooned, and hosts of others followed one another as fast as they could go. The only thing I felt sorry about was that Ambrose himself seemed content to perform as an accompanist rather than play some of his famous settings. He did give us "Limehouse Blues," however, just to prove what a marvellous musician he is, and there were close-ups of individual instrumentalists doing their stuff.

GEORGE KEEPS THE CHANGE

The programme finished with some dance routines by the Hollywood Beauties, one of them being a Hula-Hula number, with a lot of hip-swirling which Phoebe didn't care for, and a final girlish dance, with the Beauties dressed in abbreviated panties—which I did.

But then I am a confirmed "lowbrow," and don't mind admitting it. I found *Soft Lights and Sweet Music* very bracing, because I like pretty girls, and dancing and melody of the lighter kind. And low comedians like Harry Tate and Billy Bennett make me laugh. I was pleased to observe, as we drove home, that Phoebe was also in the best of spirits and had enjoyed herself just as much (perhaps more) than if she had been to London.

"That was a good show, George," she murmured. "You were very clever to think of it. I feel as if I had had an expensive evening in the West End."

"So do I," I replied truthfully, "and the best of it is that it cost so little."

"Four shillings instead of ten pounds," cried Phoebe delightedly. "You must keep the change, George, and buy yourself some clothes."

WEDDING BELLS

I HAD to go to a wedding the other day. Quite a romantic affair it was, the bride (Phoebe's goddaughter)—a pretty little girl called Olive, left an orphan when she was a child—the bridegroom, a fine young fellow in the Canadian "Mounties." They met when he was in England on leave. Love at first sight, a whirlwind courtship and a whirlwind marriage!

At least it all seemed a bit of a whirl to me, for I had to give the bride away. She walked up the aisle on my arm, trembling like a leaf, and when the parson said, "Whoso giveth this woman?" I said, "I do." Then I took two smart paces to the left, thinking so far as I was concerned, the whole thing was done and finished with.

But it wasn't! We signed our names in the vestry, and there was a lot of kissing, and then we went to an hotel for a reception. There were toasts and speeches, and I had to propose the health of the bride. I said the usual things. "I've never given a girl away before," I said. And, "the bride's as sweet as she's sweet-looking," etc., etc. Everyone cheered and I consoled myself with champagne, and then helped to tie old boots on the motor car.

The worst of wedding receptions is that they finish at such a curious time. When the bridal

WEDDING BELLS

couple had left, we emerged into the sunshine feeling slightly exhilarated (Phoebe's cheeks were like a couple of ripe tomatoes), and all dressed

'I'VE NEVER
GIVEN A GIRL
AWAY BEFORE'



up and nowhere to go except home, which would have been an anti-climax.

So we went to the pictures. I had had enough of weddings for one day, if not for a lifetime. *If You Could Only Cook*, which was on at the local cinema, seemed to offer a pleasant contrast.

The first thing we saw on the screen was Herbert Marshall getting rehearsed for his wedding with Frieda Inescourt, while somebody strummed the wedding march on the piano! Mercifully it was over soon. Herbert, very miserable about the whole affair (though personally I thought Frieda rather stunning), had an appointment at the office. Here his misery was increased owing to a row with his fellow-directors, so he had a drink, slammed the door, and went for a walk in the park. A young man on the eve of a Society wedding with a girl he doesn't love, and thwarted in his business affairs, is ripe for mischief in any form. Herbert Marshall soon found it. Seated on a park bench, reading a newspaper, was Jean Arthur!

WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Poor Jean has been out of work for some time and she imagines Herbert Marshall to be in the same plight, doubtless owing to his miserable expression. They discuss jobs: how difficult it is to get work when you're single, how comparatively easy for a married couple. "If you could only cook?" says Herbert innocently, never dreaming that little Jean was the last word in culinary skill. It was a dangerous question and it settled his fate. In a few seconds he found himself promising to apply for a joint post as cook and butler. They got the job with Leo Carrillo, a retired gangster, and Herbert Marshall and Jean Arthur are committed to masquerade as husband and wife in a small apartment.

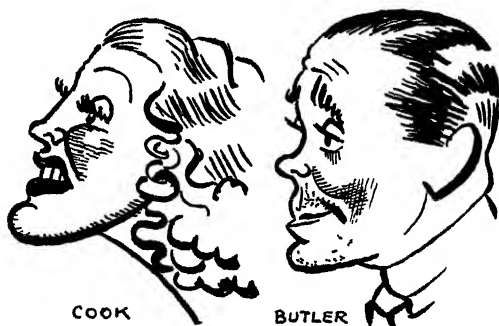
From then onwards life becomes a glorious adventure for Herbert, and he makes the best of it. But for a friend of Leo Carrillo's, called "Flash" (Lionel Stander), they would have carried off the deception. "Flash" is suspicious. He observes that Herbert and Jean do not occupy the same bedroom, and therefore infers (quite rightly) that no man in his senses would sleep outside on the balcony if he were really married to such a delightful creature as Jean. Thereupon he sets himself the task of spying upon them and finding out the truth. What he doesn't find out, however, is that the nearer the date of his Society wedding approaches, the less heart has Herbert Marshall to go through with it. The reason is obvious—he has fallen head over heels in love with his little kitchen mate.

WEDDING BELLS



WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

Honour is honour, whatever way you look at it, and Herbert Marshall is not cast as a villain in this film. He turns up for his wedding, magnificently clad in a silk hat and a well-tailored morning coat, faces the crowds of Society guests, and awaits his bride, Frieda, at the altar. She arrives, the organ plays, and the solemn procession of bride and bridesmaids walk up the aisle. The service starts, and Herbert Marshall is as good as married—but not quite! Leo Carrillo and his boy-friend "Flash," arrive just in time to kidnap the bridegroom. They have heard from Jean Arthur the true state of her heart, and they are not going to have their little cook let down under any circumstances. When the curtain drops Herbert Marshall



and Jean Arthur are engaged in a warm embrace, prior to more wedding bells.

By this time, having assisted at a wedding, attended a wedding reception, watched a rehearsal

WEDDING BELLS

for a wedding and seen a bridegroom kidnapped from a wedding on the screen, I was reaching a stage of desperation about weddings in general. But Phoebe was merely getting warmed up.

"Whatever we do, George," she announced, as we drove home, "we must not miss the new 'Show-boat' when it comes to Marchester."

"Why?" I enquired.

"Because there's a beautiful wedding in it," said Phoebe.

I said I'd sooner see a picture with a murder in it—just for a change!

WIFE VERSUS ?

IT is no exaggeration when I assert that I am not an old-fashioned sort of husband. At this festive season of the year, when Phoebe's social engagements are so infinite that she seldom stays at home, I never complain. She likes playing bridge and I hate it, so Phoebe goes to a lot of bridge parties while I frequent the pictures. She accompanies Jane to dances, and when Jane complains afterwards that her mother was the best-looking woman in the room, and attracted all the best partners, I am secretly amused. She even performs in amateur theatricals, and though the last play was called *Heart Throbs*, and Phoebe had to be hugged a lot on the stage (not counting rehearsals) by our handsome young doctor, I merely laughed when she said that his moustache tickled.

In other words, I am a tolerant person who likes to live and let live ; and even when politics entered the home for the first time, and young Mr. Dukes, the Secretary of the Marchester Liberal Club, called to take Phoebe off to judge in a beauty competition—I never grumbled.

But on that particular evening I must confess I felt a little lonely after Phoebe had gone. A long evening stretched in front of me, with nothing to

WIFE VERSUS

do but listen to a very dull radio programme, so it was almost a relief when the telephone rang.

"Is your wife in?" enquired a low, musical



voice which I at once recognized as belonging to Mrs. Prince-Mills, the widow who lives next door.

"No, she's judging in a beauty competition in Marchester."

"What a pity! I hear *Wife versus Secretary*, at the Grand, is simply splendid. I wanted Phoebe to come with me."

Then came that fatal pause when the fate of empires, maybe, hangs in the balance. "Can I come instead?" I asked.

The answer was in the affirmative, so I called for her.

I must admit I experienced an absurdly guilty sensation, when we took our seats in the front row of the gallery. As luck would have it the lights

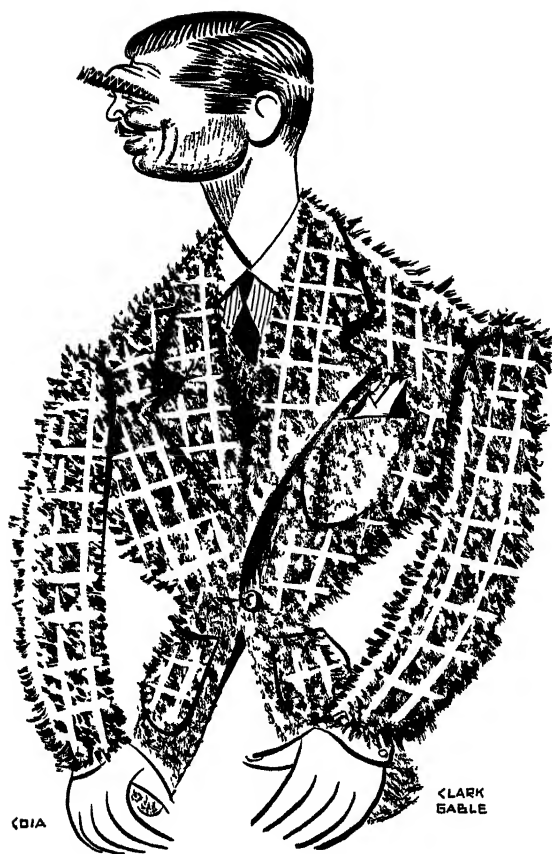
WE ALL GO TO THE PICTURES

were up, though the widow is one of those blondes who attract just as much attention in the dark. She was in a "mystery woman" mood, dressed in a navy-blue frock that snuggled round her body and ended well up on the calves of her silken legs. Several people I knew in the audience started nodding and whispering when we arrived, and I'm certain I heard giggles from the Verekers, who were seated in the row behind. However, the lights blinked out, and I soon became engrossed in *Wife Versus Secretary*, to the exclusion of everything except the screen.

It is a picture I shall always remember. The story of a happy married life, almost ruined by gossip, innuendo and misunderstanding. It is the tale of a man who, though absolutely blameless, is believed by his wife and friends to be living a double life—and, in the end, is almost persuaded to do so through force of circumstances over which he has no control.

Clark Gable is the man, and in the early stages of the picture he is at his handsomest and best. A busy young millionaire with a beautiful wife (Mynna Loy, bless her!), a lovely luxurious home, perfect servants, and everything a man could wish for in this world. His office is, perhaps, a trifle cissie-like, but this is not his fault so much as that of his private secretary (Jean Harlow). Still, it led up to one or two rather pointed remarks when May Robson (as Clark's mother) saw it for the first time—and it was from those tiny seeds of

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suspicion that the jungle of misunderstanding between husband and wife sprouted and grew.

Myrna Loy as the beautiful wife (she seemed to me to be lovelier than ever), fights hard to keep her world from tumbling about her ears. Gossips, as is their custom, hint things about the office, and Myrna retaliates, "I can't understand women who hate their husbands' business, yet are only too eager to spend every penny that comes out of it." The outward and visible signs of her husband's love are certainly very convincing, but they are not enough. Clark Gable is obviously enraptured with her every time he sees her. He kisses her eyes, her neck, her mouth, and that delightful little flat bit on the tip of her nose, which I have so often wanted to kiss myself. In fact, like a sensible man, he never grows tired of kissing and fondling this very beautiful and intelligent woman.

But all the time, behind the scenes, there is drama being enacted around the unconscious and innocent person of Jean Harlow. Clark has to go away on secret business - a big deal, bringing unexpected situations in its train, compels him to send for his clever little secretary. Jean Harlow arrives to work, and works till she nearly drops down with exhaustion. Then from the blue, a telephone call from Myrna: husband and secretary are discovered in the bedroom of an hotel at two o'clock in the morning: domestic bliss and Myrna's faith are shattered at a blow.

"If you want to keep a man honest, don't call

WIFE VERSUS

him a liar," quotes Clark Gable from an old Chinese proverb, when the extent of this circumstantial evidence dawns upon him. In his case it is perfectly true that he never thought of his lovely little secretary in the rôle of a mistress, until the suggestion was thrust upon him. Fortunately for everyone concerned, however, Jean Harlow had a faithful swain of her own in James Stewart. If James had not been in the background, if the triangle had not become a foursome, well, the ending would have been Secretary versus Wife.

"How did you like it?" I enquired of the Widow as we walked homewards.



"I was so tremendously moved, I think I broke both shoulder straps," she answered, as I left her at her gate.

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When I got home, Phoebe was sitting by the fire with a martyred look on her face as if she'd been left alone all evening.

"I just dropped in at the pictures," I explained. "I was feeling rather lonely without you."

Phoebe picked a curly blonde hair off the sleeve of my coat. "So it seems," she remarked.

WATCH OUT FOR THE MADEMOISELLES

WHEN Phoebe read out from a letter that Uncle John had gone on a cruise with his lumbago, there was an immediate depression over *Iceland* in our family. I regret this was not due to any particular concern we felt about the state of Uncle John's health. He would be quite lost without his annual attack of lumbago. He takes it away with him somewhere, and when the winter is over he returns to his bachelor routine, sun-burned and refreshed.

What did matter to us was that Uncle John had invited us to see *The Great Ziegfeld*, had even offered to pay all expenses for a day in London—and now his lumbago had spoiled a treat we had been dreaming about for weeks.

"It's coming off soon and we won't have a chance of seeing it for months or maybe years," groaned Jane. "It'll disappear into thin air like *The Mutiny of the Bounty*."

"We'll miss those clouds of glorified girls," moaned Edward. "I've been reading about them. The talent scouts searched an area of 7,000 miles; they even went to Alaska and Canada to find the 44 beauties that were picked. What do you know about that, Pop?"

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I didn't know a thing, and said so somewhat brusquely. To conceal my own disappointment I embarked on a discourse about the decadence of this pleasure-loving age. I said the family ought to think less about films and more about work. I said

"If you're feeling as bad as all that you might as well look at your income-tax summons," interrupted Phoebe, pointing to a legal-looking document lying on the breakfast table. "We might as well know the worst: I saw a magpie in the garden this morning."

The "worst" was a letter from the box-office at the Hippodrome to say that Mr. John Clockford had left instructions for four seats to be reserved for us for *The Great Ziegfeld*, and would I please state the date and performance desired, by return of post. I read out the news and the family went clean crazy. Jane turned a couple of cartwheels in the most unladylike manner, while Edward began to sing "I'm an Old Cow Hand, From the Rio Grand." Both the dogs, who had been sleeping peacefully by the fire, started barking and yelping. It was quite a while before anyone noticed the Vicar standing at the door looking mildly astonished. He understood at once, of course, when we explained the cause of the jubilation.

"How I envy you!" he sighed. "Ziegfeld was



ZIGGIE POWELL

WATCH FOR THE MADEMOISELLES



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a very great man ; I have been wanting to preach about him for some time."

"We'll tell you all about him when we get back," chanted Jane. "I'll write the sermon for you myself if you like?"

"I shall consider that a promise," said the Vicar. "In glorifying the beauty of women, Ziegfeld also glorified humanity." Then he went away, having completely forgotten what he came to see us for in the first place.

When we got to the theatre we soon discovered that the theme of the picture was very much on the lines the Vicar had mentioned. It started without fuss or preliminaries, apart from a striking manner in which the names of the staff and production staff were presented. Then it plunged straight into the life story of the world's greatest showman, and in less than ten minutes we began to realize that we were also seeing the world's greatest show.

The film mesmerized me. It filled me with a kind of ecstatic astonishment. Not because of the lavish production, or the glorified girls, or the money that had been spent on the sets, or even because of the "stars" that were in the cast. These things were all very delightful, but what "got" me was the story. Ziegfeld's life was colourful, and as the tale of it unfolded he remained the central, absorbing figure. For three hours William Powell made the man a living, vivid reality.

The women and the men who circled round his life came and went with a faithfulness to their

originals which made the film ring of truth. Luise Rainer, as Ziggy's first wife, Anna Held, plays the part with great emotion and sincerity. She is his first discovery, his first "star," and when her husband becomes so famous and successful that he finds other stars for greater shows, she battles fiercely with her own feelings. She goes on loving Ziegfeld, no matter how eccentric his conduct may be, until at last she can bear it no longer when she finds him holding Virginia Bruce in his arms. The evidence, as it happens, is only circumstantial, but it is the breaking point with Anna Held. She leaves the great Ziegfeld, knowing all the time that this is the wrong course. And how the poor dear suffers for it all her life afterwards!

The other woman in Ziegfeld's life is Myrna Loy, who plays the part of Billie Burke superbly. Ziggy sees her for the first time in the famous Sixty Club, when she is coming down the grand staircase on the arm of Frank Morgan. He exclaims, "Who is that glorious creature with the reddish-brown hair?" and when Myrna comes into view it is easy to understand the enchantment. She looks so beautiful I held my breath—and she goes on being lovely when she becomes Ziggy's second wife, until the tragedy of his death. However his fortunes in business may have fluctuated, this astounding man had the privilege of being loved by two very lovely women.

How he makes many others into the glorified stars they became is a secondary part of the story.

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How his competitor in the show-business, Frank Morgan as Billings, befriended him and stuck to him through thick and thin is a delightful little story in itself. Frank Morgan is wonderful in this part, and excites admiration for a character from whom great depth of feeling was unexpected. He is the perfect foil to William Powell, from the very beginning, when the two men were running side-shows in a fair-ground, until death parted their extraordinary friendship. The last joking, nervous, half-scared conversation between these two men, when they both felt the presence of the Recording Angel in the background, is a scene not easily forgotten. In fact, *The Great Ziegfeld* is a very impressive picture. Even in three hours I found it hard to absorb its amazing detail.

True to his word our Vicar preached about Ziegfeld's life, after he had had several conversations with Jane, who was so excited about the film she could scarcely contain herself for days after we returned from London. The child went to church to hear it, and seemed very pleased with her part in its preparation.

"What was the text?" I enquired.

"He read a verse of Goldsmith's poetry," said Jane. "It runs:

'Who pants for glory finds but short repose :
A breath revives him, or a breath o'erthrows.'"

The family was silent for a few moments, pondering about the meaning of this, until Edward James assumed the cloak of interpreter. "In other words—watch out for the mademoiselles!" he explained